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SUNSHINE ALL THE WAY

POPULAR NOVELS

BY

L. G. MOBERLY,

Published by

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ANGELA'S MARRIAGE
CLEANSING FIRES
CHRISTINA
DAN AND ANOTHER
DIANA
FORTUNE'S FOUNDLING
THE KEY OF GOLD
HIS LITTLE GIRL
HOPE, MY WIFE
IN THE BALANCE
THE SIN OF ALISON DERING
JOY, A HAPPY SOUL
A TANGLED WEB
THAT PREPOSTEROUS WILL
PHYLLIS
A VERY DOUBTFUL EXPERIMENT
VIOLET DUNSTAN
A WAIF OF DESTINY
A WOMAN AGAINST THE WORLD
UNTIL SEVENTY TIMES SEVEN
AFTER LONG YEARS
MAID MARJORY .

SYLVIA BRENTWOOD.

SUNSHINE ALL THE WAY

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BY

L. G. MOBERLY

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WARD, LOCK & CO., LIMITED
LONDON, MELBOURNE AND TORONTO
1918

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CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
I	HER COMING	7
II	THE MINTON FAMILY	21
III	THE ORMONDES	31
IV	NINA	42
V	"YOU WON'T BE DULL WHEN YOU'RE LESS LONELY"	57
VI	A GARDEN OF WEEDS	66
VII	TWO VISITORS	77
VIII	THROUGH THE YEARS	88
IX	EVA	99
X	"LET THEM SAY"	106
XI	JOHN'S REPLY	119
XII	NO. 10, THE LANE	132
XIII	REPARATION	144
XIV	"LET ME STAY HERE!"	156
XV	"SHE IS GROWN UP"	171

CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
XVI	"You Must Go and See Life" . .	180
XVII	"I would Rather Stay Here" . .	186
XVIII	In Switzerland	200
XIX	On the Brink	217
XX	In the South	231
XXI	"Oh! No"	242
XXII	"I Should Like to Go Home" . .	258
XXIII	What Beatrice Saw	269
XXIV	Eva's Advice	281
XXV	The Sleeping Beauty	292

CHAPTER I

HER COMING

ONCE upon a time John Camberley's consulting-room had worn a cheerful, friendly air, and the patients who visited it had been known to say that something in the very atmosphere of the room gave them courage and a sense of healing. But there were no signs of cheerfulness about it on an April afternoon when John sat there alone, waiting for the patients who never came. The table at which he sat was covered with untidy heaps of papers and medical journals, the carpet was threadbare and old, the chairs had a look of age and decrepitude which was shared by a mouldy fur rug in front of the fireplace, and by the dingy paper upon the walls. On the mantelpiece were two cracked vases, an ugly clock and several of John's pipes all lying in untidy confusion. But John would never allow his housekeeper, Mrs. Day, to disturb either the table or the mantelpiece with any dusting operations, and she only contrived to sweep the room by creeping into it quietly in the early morning, before the doctor had left his bedroom overhead. He spent the greater part of his days in the consulting-room that looked out across

the neglected garden, leaving it only for an occasional rapid walk through the little town and out into the country beyond. His meals were brought in to him on a tray, because he flatly declined to use his dining-room that looked out into the street, and his solitary days therefore were passed between the dreary consulting-room and the bedroom above it, both of which faced the garden at the back of the house.

On that April morning a sheet of foolscap paper half covered by his clear, scholarly writing, lay before Dr. John—for by that affectionate name he had been known to the people of Marshdale when he first succeeded to the flourishing practice of his father, Dr. Hubert Camberley.

Four years ago it had been a flourishing practice, and he, a very brilliant man of his year at Guy's, had found himself at eight and twenty the most sought after medical man in the neighbourhood. But now—as the bitter, ever-recurring thought swept into his mind, the pen dropped from his hand—now he was a pariah, and a woman had wrecked his life.

The pen lay beside the sheet of paper on which he had been writing an article for a medical journal, but he did not pick it up again, or return to his task. When those old bitter memories came into his mind, such interest as he had felt in the subject of his article had evaporated. He only sat there, staring straight in front of him, allowing his thoughts to rove as they would over the past which was still

as vividly with him as though the events he remembered had happened only yesterday.

His moody reflections were disturbed by the entrance of his housekeeper, who came into the room with a certain hesitation of manner and a perturbed expression on her face.

"If you please, sir——" she began, and John interrupted her halting speech.

"Not a patient, surely?" he said sardonically, his smile as sarcastic as his words.

"No, sir; at least I shouldn't suppose it was a patient. There's a little girl come, sir, and she's brought her box, and says she's come to stay."

"What on earth are you talking about?" John was beginning roughly, when, from behind Mrs. Day, there appeared a small child, and a child's voice said eagerly—

"Please may I come in? I think I can explain it, and Dad said I was to come." And as, with a sharply uttered exclamation of annoyance, the housekeeper moved aside, a little girl came into the room, a little girl who walked steadily up to the table and looked into John's astonished face with fearless eyes. The amazed man was just able to realise that his visitor was very small and slight and dressed in black, but before he could utter a syllable her clear voice spoke again.

"Dad sent me to you," she said; "he told me you would be very good to me, and that I should be your little girl. And I rather think you want a

little girl," she added with a deliciously infectious laugh. "This is an untidy room. But I'll soon tidy it for you."

"Oh! will you?" John answered drily, whilst Mrs. Day, with a gasp and loud clickings of the tongue, made her escape and vanished into the kitchen. "Perhaps I don't want to be tidied, and perhaps you will be good enough to tell me who you are, and why you have come. I was not expecting a visitor."

The sarcastic inflection in his voice passed unnoticed by the child; she smiled, and her smile was as infectious as her laugh.

"My name's Sylvia," she said, "Sylvia Brentwood, and I came because Dad sent me. He said you would take care of me now he had gone away and cannot take care of me any more. He sent me to you."

The smile faded from her lips, a great sadness came into her eyes, and for one horrible moment John thought that she was going to cry. But she controlled herself with an effort which he recognised as being quite remarkable in so young a child, and as her lips closed firmly, the reflection crossed his mind that there was unusual character in the small white face.

"Dad?" he questioned, the bewilderment in his mind showing itself in his glance.

"Dad said you were his friend." A note of wistfulness crept into Sylvia's tones; she moved a step nearer to the man in the chair. "You and

Dad were in the same hospital together, and when he was ill he sent you a letter."

"I never got the letter." Though the words were curt, the tone was not unkindly. The child in her black clothes, with her white face and wistful eyes, could not fail in some small degree to touch even so sternly unemotional a man as John Camberley had become: John, who was trying his utmost to stamp out all the gentler side of his once affectionate nature.

"Sometimes the posts were queer when we were in Africa," the child answered quaintly. "Just before he died"—her voice shook—"Dad wrote another letter, and told me to bring it to you myself. So I've got it here." In her hand the child carried an old and very battered-looking bag, and sitting down upon the floor she laboriously opened this bag, and having fumbled amongst its contents, drew from a dilapidated letter-case a letter which she handed to John. Then she scrambled up from the floor and stood beside the table, looking wistfully at the doctor whilst he drew the letter from its envelope. It was very quickly read.

"DOMBERG, RHODESIA,

"*February* 24.

"DEAR OLD CAMBERLEY,—

"I'm asking a big thing of you, but I don't know who else to turn to, and I'm panning out so quickly. You and I were good pals in the old days at Guy's—for the sake of the old days I am sending Sylvia to you. She is all I've got; and when I'm

gone, she will be alone in the world. Her mother had no relations as far as I know; neither have I. I've worked hard in this God-forsaken corner of the world, but I've failed. If you're still the old John I used to know, you will take care of my little girl. I've got some shares in the Mulberry mine not far from here. They should be worth £4,000. Use the money for Sylvia. Take care of her, old chap.

"Yours,

"HARRY BRENTWOOD."

John read the words through several times, then he looked up at his small visitor.

"You see," she exclaimed, when at last he lifted his eyes, "you see, Dad is your old friend, isn't he?"

"Yes." Camberley's words came slowly. "Yes, of course Brentwood and I were friends—great friends once, in the hospital days. But since that time we had lost sight of each other. I don't suppose he would have anything to say to me now; he would taboo me like the rest of the world." Sylvia only vaguely understood the speech; but the bitterness of tone made an appeal to the mother instinct which lay hidden beneath her childish exterior, and she put a hand impulsively on Camberley's arm.

"Dad said you were the best chap he ever knew; he wouldn't ever give you up." There was almost a note of indignation in her voice. "Dad said I was to try and be your little girl, the same as I was

his little girl, and "—she spoke more falteringly— "I could do lots of things for him. He used to call me his handy little maid."

"Look here," Camberley exclaimed abruptly, but in spite of his abruptness of speech he did not shake off the small hand on his arm, in some unaccountable fashion he felt powerless to do so. "You know I can't possibly have a little girl here."

"Can't you? Are you sure you can't? I'd be just as good as good. I'm truly not any trouble, and I believe you're rather lonely here by yourself."

"I believe you're rather lonely." Those words struck some vulnerable spot in Camberley's heart. If Nina had not wrecked his life and his happiness; if Nina had been here now as mistress of his house, this child with the grey, clear eyes would not have been able to use that expression about his loneliness!

"Please let me stay; I haven't got anybody belonging to me," Sylvia's voice broke in upon the train of his thoughts. "A lady from the next farm to ours brought me to London and put me in the train for here. But she isn't a friend like you are. Please couldn't you let me stay? I'd try to be a comfort to you. Daddy said I was his darling comfort."

"But I am not used to little girls. There is nothing in this house suited for them. It's a dreary hole of a place, not fit for any little girl," John said heavily.

"I don't see why that matters," the small maid answered practically, with a nod of her head; "if

you aren't used to little girls now, I believe you would soon get used to having one here. Dad said it was sort of cheery when there was a little girl about. And "—she looked appraisingly round the dismal, untidy room—" I shouldn't think it would be very hard to get the place in order." She nodded her head again with an air of wisdom. " I expect we could get away some of the dismalness. I believe Dad would say we could. And if I might stay, I'd try to be a comfort to you."

" Why should you imagine I want comforting ? " John asked, with the ghost of a smile.

" You look like it," she answered, edging still nearer to him, and looking with earnest scrutiny into his face. " You look like Dad did when he was down on his luck. Are you down on yours ? "

" Good God !—yes." The words broke with passion from Camberley's lips, and all in a moment Sylvia's arms were round his neck, her soft lips were pressed against his cheek.

" If I were your little girl, I'd make you forget about being down on your luck," she whispered, her face pressed against his. " Please let me stop with you. I'm lonely without Daddy, dreadfully lonely; and if you're lonely too, then we'd be comforts to each other. Couldn't you let me stop and be your darling comfort ? Please ! "

John Camberley in the after days was never able to make up his mind whether it was the close clasp of Sylvia's arms and the soft touch of her lips, or whether it was the pleading in her voice that in-

duced him to take so momentous a decision as he took on that April morning. But whatever steps led up to the result, the ultimate decision was the same. Instinctively his arms went round the small figure that clung to him; scarcely less instinctively he spoke the words which were to bring about so big a difference not only to Sylvia's life, but to his own.

"I don't know whether I'm adding another folly to all the foolish things I've done, but I'm going to let you stop."

"You've got such a lot of lines," she said in pitying accents, "and your eyes are so sad. I do wish they didn't have to be so sad. Perhaps you've had a terrible deal of trouble; that's what Mrs. Twining used to say she'd had. Have you had a terrible deal of trouble too?"

"Yes; I've had a lot of trouble. But I don't want you ever to hear about it. Some things won't bear talking about. If you stay here, you'll have to learn not to ask questions."

"I wouldn't like to do anything to make you angry," she answered; and there was no fear or shrinking in her manner, even though his words were stern and sharp. "I'll just try and please you all the time." Her eyes, very grey and very frank, looked into his with a square, straightforward glance; plainly she was in no way rebuffed by the sharpness of his tone, and she slipped her small hand into his with an air of confident certainty, that seemed to say she never for an instant doubted a friendly reception of her overtures.

"Heaven knows whether I am being a consummate ass," John Camberley muttered under his breath, as he pushed back his chair and rose to his feet, Sylvia's hand still lying in his, "but"—he looked rather helplessly down at the child—"I don't know what I should do with you if I didn't keep you here."

"No"—again came that sage shake of Sylvia's head—"I don't know whatever you could do with me. And Dad said he was cocksure you would let me stop with you," she added quaintly, her fingers twining themselves more closely round his hand, in a clasp that gave him an odd sense of pleasure. "I shouldn't think you would be an ass if you kept me," she went on gravely; "it would be dreadful if I had to go away again just when I had begun to know you."

A smile flickered over the man's stern face, a little light shone for a moment in his sombre eyes.

"Well," he said, "time will show whether my decision is wise or foolish; but I am going to decide to do what Brentwood—what your father asked. I'm going to keep you here. We had better go and tell Mrs. Day what has happened, and who you are, and why you came, and what we have decided," he continued. "I don't know whether I ought to have settled it without consulting her first," he added a little doubtfully, his glance scanning Sylvia's upturned face with the helplessness of the male who instinctively turns for help to his nearest womankind.

"Perhaps she'll be vexed about having a little girl here," Sylvia responded, "but if I 'splain to her that I shan't give her one scrap of an atom of trouble, she won't mind so much. I believe I'd better go by myself to tell her, if you'll just show me the way to go. Then I can 'splain."

Relief crept into John's eyes, but the small Eve upon whose shoulders this true descendant of Adam was laying his burden, plainly had no serious misgivings. She followed him into the passage, and nodded her head smilingly when he pointed in the direction of the kitchen.

"All right," she whispered, with a confidential nod, "I'll go and just tell her all about it, and about how I used to help Dad, and I believe she'll understand. Dad says people mostly understand if you just take them the right way." And with this philosophical remark she walked down the passage, leaving the master of the house to return to his consulting-room, a prey to many and conflicting emotions and reflections!

Mrs. Day was setting about her work with considerable noise and clatter, and it was evident that she was not in the best of tempers when Sylvia appeared at the kitchen door; but that little person was not easily daunted, and her face and manner showed no symptoms of discouragement or perturbation.

"Please may I speak to you?" she said gently.

"Oh! it's you," Mrs. Day answered snappishly. "Well! what did you want?"

Sylvia crossed the kitchen floor and came close to Mrs. Day's side, looking up into the cross face with a very disarming smile.

"I'm afraid you'll think me a great bother," she said quaintly, "but I'm all alone in the world, and Dad sent me to Dr. Camberley to be his little girl——"

"Lawk a mercy!" Mrs. Day ejaculated.

"And first of all I don't think Dr. Camberley thought he would like me to come," Sylvia continued, not heeding the exclamation, "but now he knows I'm very lonely he says I may stop—but——"

"Well, I never!" Mrs. Day exclaimed, the flush deepening on her face; "and what does he suppose I shall do with a little girl littering about the place and giving no end of trouble?" Her voice was loud and angry.

"I don't think I'll litter much or give any trouble." Sylvia's soft hand touched the housekeeper's red one. "Dad said I was a handy little maid, and there's lots of things I could do to help you. You see, I haven't got anybody belonging to me, and I've come to be Dr. Camberley's little girl. He's lonely, too."

"Lonely!" The housekeeper's tongue clicked loudly. "Well, I never!—'Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings,' as the good David or somebody said. But that's neither here nor there," she continued; "we aren't used to children here, neither the master nor me. I never heard such goings on and nonsense in all my born days. Whatever

would I be doing with a little girl in this ramshackle, muddly old place, and the master what he is and all? Well, I never!"

Sylvia stood silent for several seconds looking at the irate Mrs. Day, her grey eyes fixed thoughtfully on that good lady's flushed and stormy countenance, a little frown puckering her brows. Then they cleared suddenly, and whilst the excited housekeeper was still muttering wrathful remarks under her breath, the small stranger came quite close to her again, and standing on tiptoe flung two arms round her neck.

"Please let me stay with you and the doctor," she said very softly, rubbing her soft cheek against Mrs. Day's hot and angry face. "I can dust, and wash up the things, and sweep a little; and sometimes Dad let me help with the cooking. I wouldn't do anything you didn't like, and I should love to stay with you."

Later on, in the solitude of her own room, Mrs. Day confessed to herself that the touch of those arms round her neck had made her feel "all of a heap and quite shaky." Mrs. Day had her own ways of expressing herself. Who can say whether the clasp of Sylvia's arms, or the sincerity that looked out of the child's grey eyes, worked the miracle in Mrs. Day's heart? Whatever the method of its doing, the miracle was worked. And John Camberley's housekeeper, who was the bugbear of the children of the neighbourhood, and who was never known to relax her severity of demeanour

even to the smallest and sweetest of them, capitulated to the child who had been thrust so strangely and unexpectedly into her life.

"Why, there," she exclaimed, speaking huskily, "you've got a way with you, there's no denying it; and if it is to be, it will be, and we must look upon it so. And you're to be the doctor's little girl—well, I never! Did you ever hear the like? All of us lonesome together! There, now—come along with me, and we'll find a room for you—though you might knock me down with a feather." And she punctuated her amazing remarks by putting her hand under Sylvia's chin, and giving her a tremendous kiss upon the cheek.

CHAPTER II

THE MINTON FAMILY

"WHATEVER do you think I have heard now?"

Alice Minton flung on the table her string bag which was bursting with excrescences of every shape and size, and looked round her assembled family with flushed and excited face. In the small and sleepy town of Marshdale, to be the bearer of a piece of news was an enviable position, and Mrs. Minton and her other two daughters looked up briskly at Alice's words, their eyes bright with interest and curiosity.

"I was walking down Bridge Street, that's how I came to hear about it all," Alice went on, speaking rather breathlessly—and indeed she was considerably out of breath, owing to the fact that she had hurried home at top speed in order to regale her family with the latest item of Marshdale gossip—"down Bridge Street," she repeated, gulping a little in her effort to breathe more freely, and speak more quickly, "and I met Mrs. Johnson. I believe she was simply delighted to run into me like that, because she was longing to tell somebody—and so she stopped me at once, and——"

"What did she want to tell somebody?" Minna Minton, Alice's younger sister, put in. "Do be quick and come to the point. We don't want any of the descriptive passages!"

"Oh! all right." Alice's tones grew a trifle huffy; she looked coldly at Minna. "I was only just explaining to you how it came about that I heard——"

"That you heard what?" the third sister, Annie, exclaimed impatiently. "Hurry up and tell us what you did hear from Mrs. Johnson. She's such a horrid old gossip that I daresay the story she told isn't true, anyhow," Annie added with unnecessary spitefulness.

"It happens to be true—I discovered that for myself," Alice answered loftily, "and you would never guess what it is, not if I gave each of you three guesses. Mrs. Johnson told me first, and then I met Dr. Camberley's housekeeper—and that settled it."

"*Dr. Camberley's housekeeper?*" The voices of the other three women in the room repeated the words in shrill chorus. "What on earth has Dr. Camberley's housekeeper got to do with it?"

"A great deal," Alice responded, her huffiness gone with the triumphant sense that she really had a tale of unusual interest to unfold. "Whatever do you think? A little girl has come to live with Dr. Camberley."

Mrs. Minton's knitting needles dropped with a clatter on the floor; Minna laid her embroidery

upon the table and gasped aloud; and the pen with which Annie was writing a letter slid to the ground after Mrs. Minton's knitting needles.

"A little girl come to live with Dr. Camberley?" Again there was a chorus of three voices. "Whose little girl? What little girl? Why has she come?"

"Ah! I thought you would be excited when you heard," Alice said gleefully, all her recent annoyance forgotten, her eyes shining with the joy of the successful purveyor of gossip. "Well—Mrs. Johnson told me first. At least she said, 'Have you heard about Dr. Camberley?' So I said, 'No, I haven't heard anything more about him than we all know already. What has he been doing now?' And Mrs. Johnson laughed—you know her thin sort of cackling laugh—and she said, 'Oh, my dear, he hasn't been doing anything wicked *this* time. But a little child has come to live with him.' So then of course I simply nearly screamed with surprise, and she said, 'Yes, you would hardly believe it, would you? But some friend of his has left him a child as a kind of legacy—and she has actually come.'"

"Dear! dear!" Mrs. Minton managed to say, only thrusting her remark into the torrent of her daughter's words because Alice was now forced to take breath. "Fancy a child in that dreary, neglected house, and with a man like John Camberley! Are you sure it is true?"

"Of course I'm sure," Alice snapped. Mrs. Minton had an irritating effect upon her daughters,

and especially upon Alice. "I shouldn't come back and tell you all this unless I was perfectly sure of my facts. Besides which I saw Dr. Camberley's housekeeper after I met Mrs. Johnson."

"How did Mrs. Johnson know anything about Dr. Camberley's affairs?" This question came from Minna.

"Because her maid's cousin is a great friend of Mrs. Day's sister, and Mrs. Day is Dr. Camberley's housekeeper," Alice answered, much as if she were repeating 'The House that Jack built!' "Of course the maid heard about the child's arrival, and then the maid told Mrs. Johnson, and naturally she was a good deal surprised and excited. I'm sure anybody would be. Fancy anybody leaving a child in Dr. Camberley's care!"

"Somebody who has heard nothing about him for some years, I should think," Mrs. Minton said ponderously. "Is the child a relation? I don't believe the Camberleys had any relations, though. Old Dr. Camberley was an only child, and so was his wife. And John was an only child too—I believe I have often heard they had no near relations; well, they couldn't have any near ones, considering——"

"Oh! the child is not a relation," Alice interrupted her mother's ponderous sentences, and her tones were again short and snappish; "I found out that much anyhow from Mrs. Day, though I must say she was not very polite, and she nearly bit my head off when I asked her a perfectly civil

question. I shouldn't have supposed there was any harm in asking about the little girl, but Mrs. Day glared at me as if I had been impertinent. That woman gives herself airs because she happens to be called a housekeeper. I'm sure nobody living in Dr. Camberley's house need give themselves airs."

"Oh! bother Mrs. Day," Minna exclaimed; "do for goodness' sake get back to this wonderful child. You do meander about and wander from the point. Who *is* this precious child you are so excited about?"

"You would have been just as excited if you had heard it first, instead of me," Alice snapped back. "Goodness knows there are few enough excitements in this one-eyed town. No wonder we are thankful for any we can get. The child is the daughter of some old friend of John Camberley. That is all I could find out, and I believe her father sent her to John."

"Well, of course the father can have known nothing whatever about John or his career," Mrs. Minton said with decision; "he never would have given his child into the keeping of a man who lives under a cloud——"

"And deserves the cloud," Minna interrupted, glancing at her sister from the embroidery she had picked up from the table. "He never ought to have stayed on in Marshdale after all the fuss there was about him. Anybody less utterly brazen would have left the place ages ago."

"I'm sure his poor father must have turned in his grave to think of it all," Mrs. Minton chimed in, "so proud the old doctor was of the practice, and pleased that John had followed the same profession. And then to think of the mess he made of it all. Certainly——"

The good lady, at no time famous for coherence of speech, let her sentence trail into the indefiniteness of the unfinished, and her daughters, paying no more attention to her disconnected remarks than if she had been a ventriloquist's dummy, continued to discuss amongst themselves the delightful morsel of gossip brought in by Alice. They were very like the fowls in a poultry yard, cackling and chuckling over a choice piece of grain; and having thoroughly dissected their delicious morsel, their next ambition was to carry it on to others. Somebody in the town had once remarked that the Mintons' house was the one where all the local news was obtainable, and it was curious how many important little errands the three sisters remembered they must do without delay. Each errand involved a visit: each visit meant a putting of the eager question, "Have you heard about the little girl at Dr. Camberley's?" Consequently it was small matter for surprise that by the next morning the whole of Marshdale was well aware of the fact that John Camberley had been left a legacy by an old friend, and that the legacy had taken the form of a little child.

Perhaps Marshdale was no less gossipy than

other places of its size, but its inhabitants certainly did seize with avidity upon any crumb of information about their neighbours and acquaintances. And somehow it seemed to them particularly spicy and interesting that John Camberley, who for so long had been looked at askance by his fellow-townsmen—John Camberley, who was practically "taboo" to the rest of the town—should all at once have become the centre of observation of a stealthy and secret kind. That during those April days after Sylvia came to him, he was the subject of Marshdale's curiosity and interest, did not enter his head. Indeed, he was quite unaware of the fact, having no friends in the place, and only very few acquaintances, who when they met him in the street gave him a curt and hurried nod, and were obviously anxious to avoid speaking to him. He had long ago grown more or less accustomed to this state of things, and though they never failed to hurt him, he hid the hurt under a hardness and cynicism which marked his real sensitiveness of nature. Only from Mrs. Day did he receive a hint of the interest which had been aroused in the town by Sylvia's coming; but even that very slight hint he at once stamped upon ruthlessly.

"They say people are talking a lot about Miss Sylvia," the housekeeper ventured to say, when she brought the evening letters in to the consulting-room.

"Let them talk," John answered curtly, "but for Heaven's sake don't you talk to them, or repeat

any of their cackling follies to me. What Marshdale chooses to say or think about my affairs is a matter of supreme indifference to me." And when that heavy scowl appeared upon her master's face, Mrs. Day knew that she had reached the utmost limit of her tether. She dare say no more.

"There's limits," she said wisely to her cousin and one crony, an elderly lady who lived in Drenchester, the county town with which Marshdale was connected by a small local line; "there's things you can say to the doctor, and there's things you can't. And I know by the look in his eyes when I've got to the ones you can't."

Mrs. Day was paying her quarterly visit to Mrs. Cobbett, the elderly cousin, a few days after Sylvia's arrival; and seated in Jane Cobbett's overcrowded parlour, drinking Jane's superlatively strong tea, and eating her buttery hot toast, Mrs. Day became a trifle more expansive than was her custom.

"It would be as much as my place was worth to go beyond that look in his eyes, if you take my meaning, Jane."

Jane snorted sympathetically—to express that she took Anna Day's meaning very well; and Mrs. Day continued with a certain solemnity which appeared impressive, even to the not very easily impressed Jane—

"Dr. Camberley is a man that would stick at nothing if it *came* to that, which I never intend it should come, being fond of him and sorry for him. But, mind you, Jane, if I was to annoy him by

letting gossip come to his ears, or by doing anything he didn't like, out I should go as sure as you're sitting there. Things have made him hard, and no wonder either! It's not for me to blame him. Circumstances have been against him. But I can tell you I mind my p's and q's, and I do my best not to upset the apple cart."

"Pretty upsetting for your apple cart and the doctor's to have a child dumped down on you, as you might say," Mrs. Cobbett said in the fat, comfortable voice which matched her sleek, comfortable personality. "A child does seem to turn a house upside down and inside out. You never know where you are with them, or what mischief they'll be up to next. And if it isn't mischief, they've got to be seen to and kept in order, and looked after. No children for me!"

"If you'd said those things to me a fortnight ago, Jane, well—less than a fortnight ago, I should have answered, 'Hear! hear!' and agreed with every word of it. But I don't mind telling you—what I don't suppose I should ever bring myself to say to anybody else—the child we've got at the doctor's house in Draper Street is not like the children you mostly meet. She's a queer, old-fashioned little piece: knows how to behave; and she's got a way with her. I don't know as I can explain it better than by saying that—she's got a way with her."

"And the doctor's taken to her?" Mrs. Cobbett asked in some surprise, having been frequently

told of the doctor's severity and hardness. "You don't say he *likes* having this child foisted on him so to speak?"

"I don't say he liked it when first she came." Mrs. Day spoke with cautious deliberation. "It took him all of a heap, the same as it did me. He couldn't seem to believe his eyes when he saw her standing there by the table, a little bit of a thing in a shabby black frock. But she's brought her own welcome along with her, that's the only way I can look at it or explain it. She's brought her own welcome, and she's one of those that don't seem able to understand how anybody could be harsh or unkind to her. She seems to expect everybody to love her, the same as she is ready to love everybody. I never saw such a child—not in all my born days. She looks at you very straight with her big grey eyes, and she doesn't seem to take in that anybody could be put out with her, and there! to tell you the truth, I don't believe anybody could. She's such a loving little soul."

CHAPTER III

THE ORMONDES

THEIR house stood just outside the actual town of Marshdale; and Draper Street, the street in which John Camberley lived, ceased to be a street and turned into the Branstoke Road only a few hundred yards before you reached the iron gate which gave access to the Ormondes' grounds. The houses along the Branstoke Road were substantial dwellings set back from the highway, each in its own large garden; and they were chiefly inhabited by those who in some capacity or other had made fortunes of moderate or large size in Marshdale itself. Some of the owners of these substantial dwellings were retired tradesmen—amongst them also were two solicitors, and more than one Indian civilian who had chosen to settle down in the neighbourhood because it was rural, and yet within easy reach of town. But the house which bore on its gate the name The Meadow House was not owned either by an Anglo-Indian or by a man who had retired after making a fortune. The Ormondes came under neither of these heads. Noel Ormonde worked in London, and he had bought the house and the acre of ground round it a few

months before Sylvia Brentwood had first made her appearance in Marshdale, and he and his two sisters lived there in what the other inhabitants of Marshdale considered a very unsatisfactory fashion.

"You never know when they are there or when they aren't," Mrs. Cragg, the widow of a late local rector, said quite fractiously one day when discussing at a tea party the coming of the Ormondes; "it seems to me they are much more of Londoners than anything else."

And this was perhaps the case. Noel Ormonde went to London every day—being, as Marshdale vaguely phrased it, "in the City," and his sisters, Eva and Brenda, were both frequently in town, engaged in various descriptions of social work, no less vaguely described by Marshdale as "slumming."

"Though why they couldn't have taken up something philanthropic in poor Marshdale, I cannot imagine," Mrs. Cragg commented, with a characteristic sniff, totally ignoring the fact that elderly spinsters were falling over one another in their efforts to train the Marshdale poor in the way they should go. "Those Ormonde girls would have been much more suitably engaged in being district visitors or in having girls' classes here, rather than looking after East End factory girls, and stravaguing about all over the place. I've no patience with that sort of thing." Mrs. Cragg really had no patience at all with any schemes but her own, and she had never under any circumstances been known to see any subject from another person's point of

view. It was quite unlikely, therefore, that she would ever have understood the standpoint of Eva and Brenda Ormonde, whose greatest desire was to give their services where those services were most needed. They loved the little quaint town which was now their home after many years of life in a particularly gloomy and respectable London street: they loved the garden which was their brother's especial hobby, and they loved the lanes and woodlands, the hills and meadows which spread round Marshdale on every side. But they could not forget the great grey town they had left behind; they had persistent memories of the courts and alleys in some of those neighbourhoods where none but the poorest congregated; they were only too well aware how plenteous was the harvest waiting to be reaped, how few the labourers ready for the reaping. And it was for this reason and for no other that they refused Mrs. Cragg's demands (demands which might almost have been called commands)—to undertake parochial work in their new home. And the late Rector's widow would have held up her hands in dismay and surprise, could she have heard the conversation which took place in the Ormondes' dining-room on a certain April morning, just a week after Sylvia had told John Camberley that she had come to be his little girl.

Noel Ormonde, the master of the house, stood with his back to the fire, an open letter in his hand; Eva sat on the floor beside the window trying, not

very successfully, to make Bari, her St. Bernard, hold a piece of toast upon his nose; and Brenda was finishing her own breakfast with a leisurely deliberation entirely her own.

"The man and his wife who wrote about this house are coming to see it to-day," Noel said, looking up from the letter in his hand. "I asked them to fix Saturday. I didn't suppose you would want all the bother of them, and there may be arrangements to talk over in which I can be of use."

"Thank goodness you are going to be here," Brenda said lazily, with her pretty slow smile. "This is one of the occasions on which I find a use for the human male."

"Do you talk to poor old Colson about the human male in that disdainful way?" her brother asked, laughing, and throwing her the letter he had been reading. "Does he like the idea of being a sort of handy man in his wife's establishment?"

"Just at present he likes whatever I do or say," Brenda answered serenely, with another of the smiles which gave such a charm to her not too regular features. "Jack is still in the stage of thinking me and all my works perfection," she added mischievously.

"Poor Jack!" was her brother's laughing retort, "he will grow out of that in time. Meanwhile, to go back to the more vitally important question of the moment"—Noel shot an amused glance at his sister's piquant face—"in the meanwhile these people are coming to-day—Mr. and Mrs.

Danvers. They seem to think they may like to take the house for the summer months."

"And we can do our Swiss trip—oh! joy." Eva looked up from Bari's tuition with a smile of delight. "Who are these Danvers, and why do they want to come to Marshdale?"

"He is a rich man of no occupation—a *nouveau riche*, I fancy; so that probably he did, at some time, have an occupation, but what he did—or what he sold, I do not know. The agent who sent him vouches for his respectability and his solvency. They are motoring from town."

"Will they take Bari with the house?"—Eva laid a caressing hand upon her dog's great head;—"if not, I shall farm him out to Jack."

"Better farm him out to Jack," Noel answered promptly; "we know nothing about our prospective tenants beyond the fact that *quâ* tenants they are all right. Bari will be happier at Parkington with Jack. This will be our last trip *à trois*, eh! Brenda? You really mean to fix the wedding for September?"

"So Jack says"—Brenda crinkled up her eyes at her brother—"and he says it rather persistently," she added. "When Jack says things as persistently as that, I know I have to do them. I then realise that I shall have to say 'obey' very loud and clear on my wedding day."

"And even though we are rather new to the place and people, you would rather be married here than in town?"

"Oh! much rather." Brenda rose from the table, and going to Noel's side tucked her hand affectionately through his arm. "You are a perfect dear to play heavy father so beautifully, and I would much rather be married from this house, now we have made such a cosy home of it, than from a hotel. And I like the new Rector. He has such a saintly face; it makes me feel good to listen to him."

"I daresay Jack thinks you are good enough already." There was mocking tenderness in Noel's voice, and he tilted up his sister's chin that he might look more easily into her eyes.

"Jack, at present, imagines I am a well-mixed assortment of all the virtues—a perfect blend. But the poor boy won't think that for very long after the twelfth of September. Eva, I must go into the town to see that sad scandal-monger Miss Minton. She wants to speak to me about the children's country holiday fund. Are you and Bari coming too? I do not feel that I like Miss Minton in a love-your-neighbour kind of way at all," she went on thoughtfully. "She makes me think of a gimlet. Her eyes bore your secrets out of you, if her tongue can't manage to twist them out. And she is always brimming over with information about people here—people of whom I never heard."

"This place rather gives me the feeling that I want to do as the poor people do, and 'keep myself to myself,'" Eva chimed in, dismissing her St. Bernard with a "There, Bari, my angel"—and the angel

promptly dashed out of the room and plunged headlong through a bed of tulips in pursuit of an imaginary cat. "Yes—I do really feel like that," Eva went on, hoping that her brother, now absorbed in the newspaper, had not observed Bari's riotous disregard of the tulips. "It seems to me if we get really friendly with the people here, we shall begin to hear all the little local gossip, and I do want to keep clear of it all. I hate gossip and backbiting and scandal."

"Keep clear then of the widow of our late lamented Rector," Noel said drily, glancing up from his paper. "I fancy she already has her knife into you two girls, because you have not undertaken work here—work with a very big W. From what I have seen and heard of this place it is made up of cliques and sets; let us remain *fuori le mura* if we want to live in peace with all the cliques."

Noel's words recurred to Eva that afternoon when she was entertaining in the drawing-room Mr. and Mrs. Danvers, who, an hour sooner than they were expected, arrived to see the house. As the elder of the two sisters, it was Eva who always played the hostess for her brother, and she received the strangers with the pretty graciousness which was one of her greatest charms.

"I can't tell you how interested I am to come to Marshdale," Mrs. Danvers said eagerly, when the first greetings had been exchanged, and she and Eva were talking together whilst Brenda enter-

tained Mr. Danvers. "It is a place I have so often heard about. Do you know some people here called Camberley?"

"I know a Dr. Camberley by sight, that is all."

"Ah! well"—the stranger shook her head rather mysteriously—"perhaps—oh, if you don't know them, never mind. But I remembered they lived here, and I asked the question out of mere curiosity." Eva was not quite sure whether she liked Mrs. Danvers. The stranger was a beautiful woman, about that there could not be two opinions; and the girl, who was a beauty lover, looked with eyes of genuine admiration at the visitor's delicately lovely colouring, blue, long-lashed eyes, and graceful proportions. But she had an instinctive feeling for which she could not account, that behind Mrs. Danvers' charm of manner lay something that was not altogether charming: without being able to put her conviction into words, Eva was convinced that the speaker was lacking in sincerity, and almost imperceptibly her own manner to Mrs. Danvers stiffened.

"I am sorry my brother is not in yet," she said, ignoring the visitor's last remark; "he was not expecting you until rather later. He will be back, I hope, in a little while. Meantime would you like to see the house?"

"Very much. And this room certainly leaves nothing to be desired"—Mrs. Danvers' tone was graciousness itself—"it is so deliciously old world."

"We inherited the furniture from my father and

mother," Eva answered a little curtly, ashamed of herself for the little pang of resentment with which she watched Mrs. Danvers' appraising glance wander round the room; "we always try and get chintzes and carpets that will harmonise with the other things."

"You have been most successful"—Mrs. Danvers spoke emphatically, with another appraising glance —"and the garden is charming. As far as I can see it seems to be exactly the place for which my husband and I are hunting. Archibald"—she raised her voice and looked across at the stout, elderly man with whom Brenda was carrying on a desultory conversation—"I am telling Miss Ormonde how much I like this house. She suggests that we might go over it before Mr. Ormonde comes home."

"Very well, my dear—just as you like." Mr. Danvers, who was palpably thirty years or more senior to his wife, smiled a fat, genial smile upon her and rose heavily to his feet. "If you like the place, my dear, you know it will satisfy me;"—again came his fat, genial smile;—"I am more than ready to fall in with all your wishes." He moved nearer to his wife, and beamed down upon her out of a pair of small eyes which seemed to Eva to be set in wrinkles of fat. "My wife's word is law to me—absolute law," he added with a ponderous attempt at lightness which suddenly struck his listener as rather pathetic. "Come along, my dear, and let us see if there are enough rooms to

please you, and if everything is just what your ladyship fancies." He punctuated his words with a laugh at his own pleasantry, and then the two sisters ushered the strangers out of the drawing-room to begin a tour of inspection of the house.

Eva and Mrs. Danvers led the way, and the latter put many searching questions to the girl about the little town, its inhabitants, and the neighbourhood in general.

"We are so much in town that we know nobody here very intimately," Eva made answer to this close questioning. "People have called upon us, and they are most kind and pleasant to us, but I really know very little about Marshdale affairs."

"And there are good doctors here?" Mrs. Danvers asked, with what Eva took to be a note of anxiety in her accents. "You see, my husband is not very strong, and I should like to be quite sure that if we do take this house, we shall find a thoroughly good doctor in the place." They were standing now in the comfortable library close to one of the long French windows opening into the garden, and the speaker lowered her voice, as she glanced towards Mr. Danvers, who had paused with Brenda before one of the bookcases. "What medical men are there close to you?"

"We have not needed any doctor at all since we came," Eva said, "but there are three or four medical men in the place. I think Dr. Jennings is the one I have heard spoken of most."

"And what about Dr. Camberley?" Mrs. Dan-

vers broke in quickly, her voice still lowered. "You said he was still here. He practises, I suppose?"

Eva could not help noticing with what eagerness the beautiful stranger's eyes were fixed upon her face, and she had time to wonder vaguely why, for the second time since their arrival, Mrs. Danvers had mentioned the name of Camberley, when a sharp cry from Brenda cut short her reply. The two women by the window turned quickly at the sound of that cry, just in time to see Mr. Danvers sway suddenly, put out his hand to clutch at the bookcase, and then drop with a heavy thud to the floor at Brenda's feet.

CHAPTER IV

NINA

ON that same afternoon John Camberley walked quickly out of his own house, which was almost the last one in Draper Street, and along that road which, bordered first by the before-mentioned substantial houses set back in their no less substantial gardens, straggled away finally into the country beyond. At all times it was a quiet road enough, and on that April afternoon there was no traffic to be seen upon it with the exception of one lumbering cart, in which both horse and driver seemed to be sleeping soundly. Foot passengers there were none, as John passed on under the hedgerow elms whose baby leaves were unfolding in the sunlight, whilst in the branches overhead the rooks cawed softly round their nests; and in the hedge close to the path the thrushes sang. The sky, dappled with fleecy clouds, showed through the lacework of boughs, and the blueness of the sky, the budding green of the trees, the radiance of the spring sunshine, all spoke of life and hope and gladness. But this was one of John's black days: the glory of springtime only made his sore heart more sore; the very loveliness of the

world about him emphasised the darkness that clouded his own life. The waves of bitterness against fate, which had so often rolled over his soul, were running mountains high now; and he had swung out of his house with an impetuous desire to walk and walk until he was dog-tired. If he could only tire himself out completely, he thought he would perhaps be able to drown remembrance at least for a time, and sleep. And his sleep for a very long time now had been a very broken and uncertain quantity. The more brightly the sun shone, the more sweetly the birds sang, so much the more did John's heart swell with bitter resentment. He would have preferred a chilly and sunless day; he would have liked to silence the singing birds and the soft cawing of rooks; a grey world with no reminders of love and joy would have harmonised better with his mood than this happy world which spoke of nothing but new love and new life!

He was walking at a great pace along the raised pathway above the road, his head a little bent, his face very set and stern, his thoughts absorbed with his own miserable past and wrecked career, when an iron gate of a garden on his left was pushed violently open, and a girl rushed out exclaiming breathlessly—

"Oh! you are a doctor, aren't you? Please come and help. Some one is very ill. It is providential that you were passing just at this very moment. I ran out to try and catch the gardener,

to send him for a doctor, but he has just gone to his tea." She spoke in jerks, and John realised that she was very slight and young, and that her flushed face was very pretty. But she allowed him no time for connected thought, for putting her hand on his arm she almost dragged him through the gate, saying again, with little gasps for breath, "Some one is very ill. I know you by sight, you will come and help, won't you? You are a doctor, aren't you? Please come."

"Yes, I am a doctor," John answered; "but——"

"Please don't say 'but,'" the girl interrupted, when he hung back and seemed disinclined to yield to the pressure of her hand. "I am afraid there is no time to be lost; the poor man looks so dreadfully ill. They are strangers to us, which in a way makes it all the worse. They have only motored down for the day to see our house, and he all at once fell down in the library. He looks very bad."

It all sounded to John very incoherent and puzzling, but it was obvious that somebody was ill, had been taken ill suddenly; and as all his professional instincts had not been destroyed by the bitterness of his soul, he allowed his companion to hurry him along the gravelled drive to the open door of the house. He knew the Meadow House belonged to a Mr. Ormonde and his two sisters, but this bare fact was the limit of his knowledge about them, and he realised that his pretty guide with the flushed face and troubled eyes must be one of the Ormonde sisters; and at the thought that he

was actually being called in professionally, a certain excitement thrilled through his veins, an excitement to which he had been a stranger for many and many a long day.

Without further explanation the girl who had summoned him in from the road, led him into the house, a big old-fashioned dwelling which at once impressed him as belonging to well-to-do people, and people of good taste. There was a certain air of charm and refinement about it, and a sense of home, which made an appeal to the man who for so long had been lonely and living in an unhomelike house. But he had no time to dwell on these reflections. Crossing a luxuriously furnished hall, his guide pushed open a door, and ushered him into a luxuriously furnished library, where, near the bookcase, stretched out upon the soft Persian carpet, lay the inanimate form of a man. He was an elderly man, that much John observed, and he realised as well that the messenger who had fetched him was right when she said the stranger was terribly ill—sick unto death, John's professional eye noted at once. An elderly servant with a glass of water in her hand stood beside the sick man, looking rather helplessly at his grey, drawn face and closed eyes; two other agitated servants hovered aimlessly in the background; and a girl bearing a strong family resemblance to the one who had summoned him, was bending over a woman who sat in a crumpled heap upon a big armchair by the window. So much the doctor's glance took

in, and after that quick glance, he went straight to the sick man, and kneeling upon the carpet beside him laid a hand upon his pulse, and looked gravely and searchingly into the unconscious face. Only a very brief examination of the patient was needed; and when John lifted his head again and met Eva Ormonde's anxious eyes, his own face was very grave.

"I am afraid there is very little to be done," he said in an undertone. "The poor man has probably had attacks of this sort before, in greater or less degree. This time——" He paused, and the pause was significant enough to be understood by the girl who watched him.

"Oh!" she exclaimed in a horror-stricken whisper, "you don't mean—you can't mean——"

"I mean that there is not the ghost of a chance of saving him," John interrupted, rising to his feet and going to Eva's side, but still speaking under his breath. "I should be inclined to think it is a question of a very short time indeed, but if you know his people they ought to be sent for at once."

"Oh!" Eva exclaimed again, "but we know hardly anything about him, excepting that a house agent sent him here to see our house which we want to let for the summer. My sister and I live here with our brother—our name is Ormonde. That poor gentleman and his wife came to-day to see the house—and my brother is out, and my sister and I were taking them over the place when all at once the poor man swayed and groaned and fell down

on the floor. That is his wife." With a gesture she indicated the crumpled form in the armchair. "Will you—could you please tell her what you think about her husband?" There was a falter in the girlish voice, and John, despite all the brusqueness of manner he had acquired of late years, despite all his contempt for women, felt sorry for the tall, pretty girl whose eyes were so full of trouble for another woman's sorrow.

"If that is his wife, we must certainly tell her at once," he answered; "there is no time to be lost; and though I am afraid it will be a great shock, we can't hide the truth from the poor lady." So saying, he moved across the library to the armchair near which Brenda Ormonde stood, looking with wistful sympathy at the woman who was huddled there, her face buried in the big cushion.

"I am extremely sorry to have to tell you, madam——" John began, in formal but gentle tones, when the woman lifted her head and, raising herself, suddenly looked full into his face, and then held out her hands with an impulsive gesture.

"Oh! John," she exclaimed; "oh! John." For a moment the young doctor stood stock still, as though turned to stone, staring at the lovely upturned face, much as he might have stared at a ghost; and, as he looked, his own face hardened like a flint, and his eyes were as cold as bits of ice. If the lovley, appealing woman in the armchair had been a serpent-crowned Medusa, his expression

could not have shown colder repulsion and distaste.

"I did not know to whom I had the—honour of speaking," he said with frigid sarcasm. "I was passing the house quite by chance, and I was called in by Miss Ormonde. Your husband"—he paused for a second—"your husband is very seriously ill. It would not be right to mince matters, or to tell you anything but the plain truth. He has had attacks something like this before, has he not?"

"Yes"—Nina Danvers shuddered—"he has had dreadful attacks of heart. They frighten me. I feel nearly paralysed with terror now. I can't bear to see anything like that." Her voice faltered, her eyes grew more appealing, but the expression of the man beside her remained immovably stony. "Do you mean this is a worse attack than others he has had?"

"Much worse," John answered tersely. "As far as I can judge, I am afraid I cannot hold out any hope that he will even recover consciousness." Mrs. Danvers screamed faintly. "I do not consider it right to deceive you, or bolster you up with any false hopes. Your husband is dying; and I think the end is not likely to be very long delayed."

Brenda, standing close to the armchair, looked with a flash of indignation from his stern face to the white face and frightened eyes of the sick man's wife. It seemed to the girl that the doctor had spoken with unnecessary harshness—indeed, with actual brutality—but he went on speaking before any one else could utter a syllable.

"I will do all that can be done for the patient," he said, "and meanwhile I must ask you to send for another medical man."

"Why? Oh! John, why must anybody else be sent for? I am quite satisfied to have you. I know I can trust you. Why must any one else come? Surely you have forgiven me now?" There were tears on her uplifted face, her voice faltered into silence, her blue, tear-filled eyes looked wistfully at him. But his lips only set themselves more firmly, there was no softening in his glance. It was still as cold and hard as though the very sight of her was distasteful to him.

"I should like a second opinion," he said, ignoring her words about forgiveness and avoiding her glance, "and it is quite impossible that I should undertake the case, though I will do all that can be done for the moment. But I want you to understand how very little there is to do. I must be honest with you. There is no hope of saving him."

The woman in the armchair gave a little cry, and flung out her hands towards him; but he ignored her appealing hands as he had ignored her appealing words, and having asked Eva Ormonde to send at once for Dr. Jennings, the most important physician in Marshdale, he returned to the prostrate patient. He knew that, humanly speaking, there was little enough that either he or any one else could do for the man who lay before him; but such things as could be done John did quietly, almost mechanically.

He sent the elderly servant for pillows, blankets, hot bottles, and with her help made the sick man as comfortable as was possible.

"It is better to leave him quietly there than to attempt to lift him on the couch," John said decidedly; "he is heavy and big. You cannot move him until you can get three or four men to help you; and the less he is moved about the better." But although the doctor did his work in so quiet, so methodical a fashion, yet underneath the cold exterior and the quiet manner which had at once made him master in that room of frightened women, a volcano was raging. He himself was appalled by the storm of emotion which swept over him now that he was once again face to face with the woman who had made such havoc of his life. Nina here? Nina huddled up in that arm-chair, looking at him with tear-dimmed eyes and quivering lips, because her husband—the rich elderly man who had supplanted him—lay unconscious, sick unto death. It was like some strange and dreadful nightmare to realise that he—he, John Camberley, was in the same room again with the woman upon whom he had lavished all the wealth of his young love and adoration, the woman who had seemed to him to stand for all that was most beautiful and wonderful in womanhood itself. He was torn in two by conflicting longings. Hot anger against Nina struggled with an insane desire to seize her in his arms, to crush her against him, to kiss the lovely face which for four long years

had haunted him like an obsession. But the anger and the bitterness predominated over the softer sensations; and when presently Dr. Jennings was ushered into the room, Camberley's prevailing feeling was one of intense relief.

Camberley's appearance was a great contrast to Dr. Jennings', who had an air of being recently turned out of the proverbial band-box, for the younger man's clothes were shabby, his face lined and worn, his hair rough and unkempt. He seemed to belong to a world quite apart from the man with the sleekly brushed hair, the smooth, self-satisfied face, and immaculately cut clothes; and there was about him a certain forlorn air which proclaimed to the world that he was a failure. And Dr. Jennings not only consistently hated and avoided failures in general, he also regarded this particular failure with what he was pleased to call "righteous indignation."

"You?" he questioned, lifting his eyebrows as Camberley moved towards him to explain what had happened, and the line of treatment he had taken. "I am rather surprised to find *you* here." The emphasis on the "you" was offensive, and John winced. But he recovered himself immediately. In the past four years he had almost taught himself to be callous to rebuff and contempt; both had been persistently his portion.

"I happened to be passing the house," he said quietly, "and Miss Ormonde called me in to see Mr. Danvers. The attack was very sudden." He

briefly described exactly the condition in which he had found the patient, and the measures he had taken to relieve him; and then without waiting for further comment from the other medical man, he went up to Eva, who stood a little in the background, her face still flushed and troubled, her eyes full of anxiety.

"Dr. Jennings will take everything in hand now," he said to her; "he will do all that can possibly be done. I am very sorry all this has happened in your house. I hope your brother will be back soon; it is a great anxiety for you."

"My brother had only gone into the town to see somebody; he was—I mean he is coming back to tea. It is so difficult to remember we were going to have tea just in the ordinary way." Eva's eyes met John's with a certain bewilderment. The two had withdrawn a little from the group in the centre of the room, and were talking in undertones close to the window.

"Yes," he said gently, "I know. It is always difficult to realise that whatever happens to us life goes on in a normal way. But your brother will be in soon?"

"Oh! yes—I am sure he will be in soon." Eva repeated the words. "You see, Mr. and Mrs. Danvers arrived earlier than we expected. They were to have been here in time for tea, to talk over things with my brother; and he meant to have been back—and now——" Eva did not finish her sentence; she looked from the unconscious man

over whom Dr. Jennings was bending, to the figure crouched in the armchair, and then back again at Camberley. "It is all so dreadful," she said under her breath, "and oh! please—must you go away?" At the childish words a grim little smile crossed Camberley's face.

"There is no reason for my staying now that you have Jennings," he answered; "and I"—he hesitated—"you know I am not looked upon with any favour in Marshdale, Miss Ormonde. The sooner I am out of your house, the better for you." Such exceeding bitterness crept into his voice as he spoke, that the girl put out her hand impulsively.

"Please don't talk like that," she said. "I am sorry you must go out of the house, and I am very grateful to you for coming and helping us just when we most wanted help. Thank you ever so much."

John wrung the hand she held out to him, and if his grip of her small fingers hurt them she made no sign; and the grateful look in her eyes made John's sore heart a little less sore. As he was moving away from her and towards the door, the woman in the armchair lifted her head again, and their eyes met. But his face was set like a mask, and he passed her by as though he were totally unaware of her presence, making his way quickly across the hall, out of the house, and so down the drive into the elm-bordered road. His thoughts were in a turmoil. Old memories, old scenes flashed into his mind with startling vividness; and as he hurried on along the dusty highway, he was living again in the

past of four years before. As plainly as though it were actually there before his eyes he saw the rectory garden where he and Nina had first met, when he was in the heyday of his youth, beginning a career which promised to be one unbroken pathway of success. He and Nina's brother, Tom Merdley, had been fellow-students at St. Dunstan's, and the week-ends which he spent in the village of which Tom's and Nina's father was rector, were marked on the diary of his soul in letters of gold. The sloping lawn where the boughs of a cedar tree swept the daisy-covered grass; the pergola of roses from which crimson petals dropped upon Nina's white gown; the orange sky of sunset behind the church tower round which the rooks cawed softly before flying homewards to their nests in the great elm trees—that was a picture that spread itself before his eyes. Or spring afternoons when a beech tree in the lower garden was unfolding leaves of new green, and the fruit trees showed a cloud of blossom against a blue sky; when the lilacs were in bloom and the thrushes sang—he could see those afternoons as though they were only lately passed, and almost smell again the sweetness of the hawthorn flowers and the delicate fragrance of laburnum! And Nina herself was always the centre of all the pictures—Nina with her lovely face made the crowning glory of all the spring and summer loveliness.

They had drifted so quickly from friendship into love, she and he who was her brother's friend! And

in his eyes she had seemed perfection from the very first, just perfection, neither more nor less: all that she looked and said and did was right in his eyes. He loved her with the blind, overwhelming love of a man who had never before come into close contact with any woman, who brought to this particular woman all the best and purest of his young manhood.

With almost painful clearness of vision he remembered the evening when he asked her to marry him —the pale green sky in the West, the brightness of the evening star; the fragrances of pinks and Scotch roses that grew in the bed round the lawn, the insistent notes of a blackbird's voice. All these seemed to be inextricably mingled with the memory of Nina's face and Nina's voice when she promised to be his wife. She had smiled up into his face when he drew her for the first time into his arms, and he could have sworn that her eyes were alight with love: and the very words she had said in her pretty ringing voice still echoed in his brain.

"I couldn't be anything but true to you, dear; I love you so."

The man walking at such a rapid pace between the budding elms smiled sardonically. "I couldn't be anything but true to you." Yet, six months from that day when she had plighted her troth to him in the garden that was fragrant with Scotch roses and pinks, Nina Merdley had married Archibald Danvers, a rich elderly friend of the Squire of her father's parish. John recalled every word of the prettily penitent letter he received from her,

begging for his forgiveness; and remembering every syllable of it with such exactitude, he laughed aloud out there on the dusty highway. She begged him to forgive her—oh! yes, the expressions of penitence had been very well turned; the plea for forgiveness had been framed in most suitable language, he did not deny either of those facts. She had added that she had discovered she did not care for him in quite the right way, consequently she felt she could not, she ought not to marry him, and would he still go on being her friend, even though she could not be his wife? Again John laughed, and this time a single passer-by heard him, and looked at him with a nervous start, wondering whether he had suddenly gone mad.

Nina had jilted him for a richer man. That was the plain and ugly truth in plain and ugly words; and he shuddered even now to remember the black pit of misery into which he had fallen, when he realised that the girl he had so wholly loved and trusted was unworthy of either love or trust. The barque of his love had gone to pieces on the rocks, and with utter recklessness he had allowed it to sink in a whirlpool of despair.

Perhaps he could have fought through that bitter and terrible time if only old Dan Simpson had not died in so mysterious a way! John kicked a stone savagely out of his path as the old memories poured into his mind. Dan Simpson had died, and people declared the doctor was to blame. The death was laid at Camberley's door, and to Camberley himself that death was still quite unaccountable.

CHAPTER V

"YOU WON'T BE DULL WHEN YOU'RE LESS LONELY"

THE memory of Dan Simpson's death and of all the circumstances attendant upon that death filled John Camberley's mind during the remainder of his homeward walk, and, as he had done scores of times before, he went over and over again in his mind all those circumstances which at the time had seemed so inexplicable; which even now seemed to him to admit of no explanation. But the blame had fallen upon him; and although at the inquest he had escaped anything more than a grave censure from the coroner, his fellow-townspeople had ever since shown him with unmistakable clearness that for his medical ministrations they had no taste; and tongues had wagged, and heads had been shaken over him, in a way which would have driven many men out of the place for ever, shaking its dust with loathing from their feet. But John Camberley, whatever his faults and failings, was not made of the stuff which runs away from disaster. A certain dogged strain in his character prevented him from leaving the house of his fathers, even though those who had been friends of his family turned their backs upon him, and would have none of him. Walking along the road on

that April afternoon, he shrugged his shoulders, and laughed aloud for the third time, much as he had laughed and shrugged his shoulders four years before, when men and women first began to cross the street hurriedly, or look the other way when they saw him coming; when old acquaintances gave him no greeting, when he was shunned by those who had once smiled upon him and welcomed him. Well, he reflected, after that his practice had dwindled to nothing; he himself had gone to the devil—and he deliberately chose to go to the devil in Marshdale, because of a certain pride and doggedness which refused to allow him, as he put it, to be hounded out of the place! With these thoughts pulsing through his brain it can be understood that he reached his house in no enviable frame of mind; and as he let himself in at the front door, he was still so absorbed in the past and its bitter memories, that he started violently when a small figure rushed across the hall to greet him. The events of the afternoon had driven Sylvia completely out of his mind; the sight of her came to him with a distinct shock of surprise, not unmixed with dismay. Brentwood's little girl! He had forgotten her very existence. The meeting with Nina, the mental turmoil brought about by that meeting, the reopening of old wounds and the old pain, had wiped a sponge over more recent events, and there was more of bewilderment than of anything else in his glance as it fell upon Sylvia.

"I am glad you've come back," she cried, not

noticing his bewildered expression. "I was most dreadfully afraid you were going to be late, and please you've got to come and have tea with me. I've brought it up myself into your study."

"Oh! have you?" John said dully, trying to infuse some interest into his tones in response to Sylvia's eager accents. "What made you think of doing that?"

"I don't know. I just thought of it." Sylvia slipped a hand into his and looked up at him with a smile. "You see, it's rather lonesome for you having tea by yourself, and Dad always said it was jolly bad for any man to be lonesome. He said sometimes they saw blue devils when they were lonesome."

"Dad was perfectly right," John answered with a harsh laugh. "Lonesome people have plenty of unpleasant experiences—blue devils amongst them."

"So then we mustn't let you be lonesome," the child said with old-fashioned seriousness. "First of all Mrs. Day said you mightn't like me coming to have tea in your study; but when I said it was a pity you should be lonesome, then she let me—and she said, 'Well, I never, out of the mouth of babes; and lonesomeness is a trial.'"

Her quaint reproduction of the housekeeper's voice and phraseology brought a smile to John's face; and as he and Sylvia went hand in hand to the study, some of the overwhelming weight which had lain heavy on his soul all the afternoon seemed to be lifted away.

"You see, I've tidied the study up a bit," Sylvia said, as they entered the room; "it was in the most fearful mess. I don't know when I ever saw a much untidier room. It was all higgledy-piggledy, anyhow. I can't think how you ever found any of your things." She looked at him with a certain odd severity. "But there! I believe all men are untidy. Dad's room was always in a muddle as soon as ever my back was turned. I did tidy up a lot after him."

John laughed, but as he glanced round his study, he was aware of a difference in it, and of a very pleasant difference. The chaotic jumble of papers on the table had been arranged neatly into heaps; the huddle of pipes upon the mantelpiece had been disentangled, and the pipes now lay in serried rows each in its own place; a vase full of golden daffodils made a refreshing patch of colour against the drab wallpaper, and the books which had been heaped pell-mell upon every available chair were put away into the shelves. Newspapers, which had lain in confusion just where he threw them, were now piled together in a corner, and the whole room seemed to have acquired an air of being tended and cared for, which gave John an unaccustomed sense of pleasure.

"I found these flowers in the garden," Sylvia said, nodding towards the yellow daffodils; "but, my goodness! I can't think how ever they managed to grow with all those lots and lots of weeds. There are just a few poor flowers trying to poke through,

but it must be hard work for them"—she chuckled softly—"the weeds are so big and strong, and they go pushing themselves everywhere, so that the poor flowers don't get a chance. I think we'll have to see to the garden very soon," she ended, with a wise shake of her head; "we can't let the poor pretty flowers be all choked and spoilt by those great pushing weeds. I haven't ever seen an English garden before, but I shouldn't think it ought to look like this one looks."

"No, you are quite right, it ought not," John spoke abruptly; "it ought to be a very decent garden."

"Then let you and me make it a very decent garden," Sylvia said earnestly; "it won't be very hard to do, will it? If only Dad was here, couldn't we be happy together, we three—you and Dad and me; and Dad would have helped us make the garden nice. He liked to have a garden tidy, even though he wasn't very tidy in his room. Still, he wouldn't have liked that untidy garden here, nor yet this dull room." She looked round the dreary apartment thoughtfully.

"Wouldn't he have liked this room?" John questioned, his eyes watching the depression flitting over the child's eager face. "Why not?"

"Because it's such a dull, drabby kind of room, and Dad liked things bright. He always said, 'Let the sunshine pour in everywhere; and if you can't get real sunshine into your rooms, then try to make them seem sunny——'"

"Seem sunny?" John repeated after her.

"Yes." She frowned a little in her effort to make her meaning clear. "Dad meant that we've got to try to make ourselves and our rooms and everything all round us as sunny as we can. Dad used to say, 'Open the door and windows of your soul and flood it all with sunlight.' I can't quite explain to you what Dad meant, but I believe I know."

"I believe I know too," John said slowly, "and I believe you are perhaps doing what he meant. And now didn't you say you were coming to have tea with me?"

"I brought up nearly all the things myself." Sylvia nodded towards the corner of the room where a small tea table was laid for tea. "I didn't bring the tray, 'cos Mrs. Day said it was too heavy, though I believe really and truly I could have carried it. But I didn't bring that, only I brought the bread and butter and cake, and the teapot and hot-water jug. It was my plan. And Mrs. Day first thought I'd best have tea in the dining-room like I have done the other days since I came. But I knew you'd like me here, so I persuaded her."

"How did you know I should like you here?" John asked, dropping into the armchair and looking with amusement at Sylvia, whilst with infinite care and absorption she poured out the tea. "How did you know what I should like?"

"I just knew you were very lonely in here all by yourself. And Dad used to say when he felt a bit

lonely and I went and sat with him, that I was his darling comfort. So then when I thought about you being lonely, I just felt I'd best come and have tea with you. Men do get a bit lonely sometimes, don't they?"—she looked across at John with a sort of motherly understanding in her eyes—"and Dad said even little girls could help when people were lonely."

"I think I ought to have got used to being lonely," John answered bitterly.

"I don't think people ever get really used to it," came the decided reply. "I believe some day you'll be glad you have taken me to be your little girl. P'raps it'll make you feel less lonesome, and then you'll be glad."

"Perhaps I shall," John answered, speaking more warmly than he felt, because of the wistfulness in her tones; "but the real question is whether you will be able to put up with living in a dull house like mine, with only a dull chap like me inside it."

"You won't be dull when you're less lonely," Sylvia said with an air of friendly assurance; "and when I get this room nice and the garden tidy, you'll just see how much better you feel."

"Shall I?" John said absently. "I wonder what it would be like to feel—much better?"

"Nicer than feeling—all anyhow," Sylvia answered quaintly. "I believe you've got a sort of extra worry to-day, haven't you? Sometimes Dad had extra worries; and it's bad when you get them, isn't it?" The childish voice had in it a

ring of tenderness which gave John an odd sense of comfort.

"Yes, it is pretty bad when you get extra worries," he said, "and I *am* a bit worried to-day. How did you realise it, you queer little mortal?"

"'Cos I used to notice Dad when he had bad times, and I'd know by his face when he was feeling worse than usual. That's how I know."

"I had rather a beastly afternoon," John explained, wondering, as he did so, why he was talking in this way to a child, but again experiencing that odd sense of comfort in doing so.

"Isn't that horrid now?" she exclaimed; "but we just won't think about the nasty things for a little while. That's the way Dad and I did. We made it a kind of game."

"A kind of game?" John repeated absently, his eyes on the eager upturned face. "What kind of game?"

"Well," she said, "it was like this. When Dad had those extra worries and came in with a tired face, and wrinkles round his eyes like you have now, I'd say to him, 'We've got to play pretty quick at thinking about something and talking about something else, haven't we?' And he'd say, 'Yes, little maid, we have'; and then we'd start thinking and talking about everything excepting the extra worries. We'd think about the new plants in the garden, and the new babies down in the native huts; and about England, and what Dad did when he was little. Oh! and heaps and

heaps of things. First I'd think of something to talk about, and then Dad would; and we'd get as interested as you like, and Dad's face wouldn't look so tired any more." At the end of her eagerly uttered words she was quite breathless, and her eyes were bright with eagerness.

"That sounds a good game," John said, smiling in response to her infectious smile; "you must teach me how to play it too."

"Yes, I shall teach you how to play it"—she nodded her head wisely—"and this first time when you don't exactly know about it I'll begin. We'll talk a bit about South Africa, shall we? I'll tell you just exactly what our home out there looked like. It was quite different from England—ever so different." Again her little attempt to divert his thoughts gave the sore-hearted man a wonderful sense of comfort, and not for the first time that day, Mrs. Day, seated at her own tea in the kitchen, caught the unusual sound of her master's laughter.

"I never thought to hear him laugh like that again," she exclaimed aloud, addressing her remarks to the sleek tabby cat who sat gazing pensively at the fire; "if an angel from Heaven had come to tell me, I should never have believed little Missy could have done so much as she has done in a week. She's got a way with her, I will say, and nobody could deny that she has. But I never thought that in only a week she'd have made that poor dear laugh again—never. God bless her for it, that's what I say. God bless her for it, the loving little soul."

CHAPTER VI

A GARDEN OF WEEDS

A MAIL or two after the arrival of John Camberley's unexpected guest, the young doctor received a letter from a firm of lawyers in South Africa, setting forth briefly the financial position of their client Harry Brentwood at the time of his death, and enclosing a copy of his will. From this document Camberley discovered that his old hospital friend had appointed him sole guardian to his daughter Sylvia, who appeared to be curiously destitute of relations. He furthermore learnt that the child inherited from her father a sum which would give her an income of about two hundred a year, sufficient, in the words of the will, to educate her as a lady.

"A lady, and above all a good woman."

John, as he read those words seated alone in his study, laughed a bitter little laugh. For the last four years, he reflected, he had had little enough to do with good women. There was a cynical doubt in his mind whether such a person as a really good woman existed at all, in a world where beings like Nina could shatter a man's faith and love and all his higher ideals.

Harry Brentwood wanted his child brought up to be a good woman, and the making of the good woman had been entrusted to his hands by his old friend, who actually seemed sure that he was capable of fulfilling such a trust! Ah, but things had changed with him, changed very much for the worse, since he and Brentwood had worked and talked together in the good old hospital days before he met Nina. If Brentwood could see him now, it was quite unlikely that he would wish to put Sylvia into such wavering and feeble hands, quite certain that he would have grave doubts whether such hands could help to mould her into noble womanhood. It seemed to him that he would be more of a hindrance than a help, and Brentwood would probably think the same. And yet the task had been given to him, and given by the dead to whom there is no appeal.

Whether or not he was fitted for the task, the task was his. For good or ill Sylvia Brentwood was his legal ward, and it lay with him to see that she was brought up to be what her father had hoped to see her. The only remaining question was, how could he fulfil the trust?

"She shall have nothing to do with women, that I swear," John muttered under his breath. "I'll take care that no woman's humbug and subtlety shall be put into her." His eyes hardened, as he drew paper and pen towards him to write an answer to Brentwood's lawyers, but they softened curiously again when there was a soft tap at the window, and

he looked up to see Sylvia beckoning to him from the garden, her dark hair blown about by the breeze, her face flushed, her eyes bright and eager.

"Come out quick," she called. "I want you to see what a great lot of weeds I've cleared away. I've been ever so busy."

John rose from the table with alacrity. He was willing enough to escape from his own thoughts.

"It's perfectly dreadful. We must think about this path pretty soon. It's just choked up with weeds. But first I'll show you what I've been doing at the other end;" and Sylvia led him to the upper part of the untidy garden, where a certain amount of clearance had been made in one of the weed-choked beds.

Since the child had expressed such horror at the condition of the garden, John himself had worked hard in it every day, trying to bring some order out of the chaos into which it had sunk; and though perhaps he would not have owned it, the exercise, the open air, and the sunshine were all having a share in helping him back towards a more wholesome outlook on life. Sunshine and fresh air have such a cheery fashion of sweeping away moroseness and gloom, and putting a new heart into the most despairing and bitter people.

"You see, it's simply shameful," Sylvia said earnestly, waving her hand towards a thickly tangled growth of weeds, which had once been a flower bed; "it's like the forest that grew up round the sleeping beauty, isn't it? My goodness,

it is a fearful tangle—just a great muddle of things. I wish we could find a Sleeping Beauty inside, don't you?" There was breathless excitement in her voice. "I know just what she'd be like. She'd be a fairy Sleeping Beauty, very tiny and very lovely; and then when you'd cleared away the forest and found her, you'd kiss her and she'd wake, and all the garden would blossom like the rose. When we've dug away all the weeds, can't we plant a very special flower just there?"

"I believe you've got your fairy tales and your Bible a bit mixed, haven't you?" John asked. "Never mind. Fairy tales teach you fine truths too. Perhaps we shall most of us find that we must toil through weeds and brambles before we find the greatest beauty that is waiting for us—if the beauty is there at all, and that I am inclined to doubt."

"Oh! the beauty is there all right." Sylvia laughed her gay little laugh, though there was a puzzled look in her eyes as though she could not quite follow him. "You talk rather difficult talk, like Dad used to sometimes, but I know Dad would say the beauty is there. Dad said there were always beautiful things behind the ugliness, just the same as there's always light behind the darkness. Let's make a pretend Sleeping Beauty. When we've dug away all the weeds, can't we plant a very special flower just there, same as I said just now? A very special flower, and we can call it the Sleeping Beauty, so as to make us think about the

fairy tale? And it *will* be a sleeping beauty too," she added thoughtfully, "until the flower comes right out. Nobody wouldn't ever guess, if they just looked at a root or a seed, what a lovely flower was coming up out of them, would they?"

"No, never," John answered, "and I expect your Dad would have deduced from that the beauty wrapped up in homely coverings, the soul of goodness in everything."

Sylvia's eyes were again a little puzzled.

"Dad always said there was beauty and goodness everywhere if we could only hunt them out," she said, "and we could have a beautiful flower in this weedy bed when we've cleared off all the weeds, couldn't we?"

"Yes—we certainly will." There was a new note of vigour in John's voice, a new light in his eyes. "We might have a rose in the centre, or a whole bed of roses if you like."

Sylvia clasped her hands ecstatically.

"Oh! I would like, I would like," she exclaimed, "and—just there behind the seat where the bed begins to go along the terrace couldn't we have lilies—tall ones like I've seen in pictures of English gardens?"

"You shall have what you choose in the beds. I can run to some lilies and roses and any other flowers you fancy, even though times are not at their best."

"It does seem a pity about times being bad." Sylvia sat herself down on the seat she had indicated

at the place where the flower bed began to go along the terrace, and pulled John down beside her. "Couldn't you make the times better anyhow? They can't go on being bad all the while."

For a moment the man was silent, his eyes travelling over his neglected garden where, now that May had come, the pear tree was white with bloom, and there were golden buds on the laburnum. A blackbird, sitting on the pear tree, fluted melodiously; the air was soft with the promise of coming summer, and sweet with the fragrance of growing things. He sighed impatiently and turned back to the child.

"How can I make things better?" he exclaimed. Imperceptibly he had dropped into the way of talking to Sylvia almost as if she were a grown-up person. "They have got into a hopeless muddle, simply hopeless, and I don't know how to put the muddle straight."

"Is it like that bed of weeds, all a tangle, like the Sleeping Beauty's forest?"

"Very much like," he laughed ruefully.

"Well, we're going to pull all those weeds up, and get that bed straight, and put a Beauty into it, so p'raps you can do the same with your muddles," was Sylvia's practical rejoinder. "Couldn't we get them unmuddled, and find a Sleeping Beauty in the middle of them?" Again her gay laugh rang out across the garden, and then she slipped her hand into John's hand. "I wish you could have a lot of patients like Dad used to have," she said;

" you'd feel busy then, wouldn't you ? and when you're busy it's always better."

" Yes, I should feel busy then, quite a novel sensation for me, and it certainly would be better in every way." His tones were very bitter. " But patients don't come my way nowadays."

" I should think we'd got to make them come somehow," pondered Sylvia, the practical. " What made them leave off coming ? "

John's miserable blue eyes looked into the child's clear grey ones, and a shamed expression crossed his face.

" I went to pieces a bit four years ago—and patients don't care about me now—that's all."

" Went to pieces ? " Sylvia frowned in bewilderment, then to her companion's amazement she laughed a little peal of laughter. " But you aren't like Humpty-Dumpty ? " she said ; " all the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't have picked up *his* pieces, poor old thing ; but you can pick up your own pieces, can't you ? At least "—again she frowned—" once I heard Dad say, ' somebody had gone to pieces and picked himself up magnificently.' Couldn't you do it too ? "

" I don't imagine I could do anything magnificently." Something in John's laugh hurt the child, young though she was, and her small hand squeezed his with a sudden pressure. " Even if I picked myself up, I doubt whether I could collect my practice again. That went to pieces at the same time I did."

"It's a most dreadful pity"—Sylvia shook her head sagely—"but I should think we could try and collect the pieces." John smiled. It was absurdly comforting to his sore heart to hear this small ward of his identify herself with him and his interests. He had never so completely realised the extent of his own loneliness as he realised it now that Sylvia's fingers curled themselves round his hand, and her soft voice reiterated, "It's a most dreadful pity, but we'd better try and begin to collect the pieces." During the past four years John had dropped out of the world of his friends, and of relations he had practically none; he looked at Sylvia with a wistful smile that made his face for the moment very boyish.

"I'm rather like that gentleman who went and ate husks with the swine," he said, "and all the people here who don't approve of husks or swine would rather not have much to do with me."

"That's pretty silly of them if you've left off eating husks," Sylvia answered promptly, "and I expect you have left off eating them."

"Yes—I have," he exclaimed with sudden energy; "God knows I've been a fool and worse, but I've done with the swine and the husks. If I hadn't I shouldn't let you touch my hand."

"Well—my hand's dirtier than yours really," Sylvia said innocently. "You see, I'd pulled up such a heap of groundsel, and the chickweed was just as thick as thieves. Gardening does make one's hands dirty, but it soon washes off."

"Sooner than some other stains do," John muttered.

"There's lots of things for taking out stains, though." Sylvia looked smilingly into his face. "I know some, and if you tell me just exactly what's stained, I believe I can help you get the stains off."

"Can you? I wonder. Do you know I think your father found exactly the right name for you when he called you his darling comfort," John went on abruptly, and with apparent inconsequence.

"Do you think so really—really and truly?" Sylvia flushed pink with pleasure, her eyes shone. "Could I some day be a comfort to you, too, when you get to know me better?"

"You're making a very good beginning"—John looked at the small figure in its blue overall and realised with an inward start how far already she had crept into his heart and life—"and you will have plenty of chance, as I told you at breakfast; we are going to stay together as guardian and ward until you are twenty-one; and then you can go your own way."

"I expect I'll always want to stay with you; we shall have got used to each other by that time, shan't we?"—she nodded at him gravely—"and I should hope by then we shall have got the garden into lovely order—and the house quite tidy. There's a lot to do before I'm twenty-one, Mr. John." This was the name by which from the first Sylvia had called him, having been accustomed to hearing her father speak of his friend as "Good old John,"

and John himself was well pleased with her choice.

"Yes," he said, "there is a lot to do before you are twenty-one, and I don't know that I am altogether the right person to bring up a girl in the way she should go. I've made a pretty poor job of myself; what sort of a mess shall I make if I have somebody else's life to manage?"

"I don't believe you'll make a mess at all"—Sylvia edged nearer to him, and the soft pressure of her hand gave him again that strange sense of comfort—"I believe you'll manage me very well; you see we understand each other, don't we?" she added earnestly.

"I really think we do." John looked down at her with a smile. "We seem to have 'sized each other up,' as Mrs. Day would say. And in any case your father gave you to me, and I mean to do my best to carry out his wishes. We shall have to consider your education, Sylvia. Mrs. Day can teach you to sew and to cook and to do all the things a woman ought to do with her hands; and I mean to brush up my book learning and teach you the rest. By Jove, I should like to look ahead and see what we shall make of you, she and I; I wonder what you'll turn out in the end. It is going to be a fairly unique bringing up. I wonder what will come of it."

"I wonder," Sylvia echoed, her eyes smiling up into his; "but I expect now we'd best finish our bit of weeding, hadn't we? We've got a most awful big bit to do before tea. Come along and let's do it. We mustn't waste our time."

Sylvia jumped down from the seat, and laying her hand again upon John's hand was preparing to draw him back to the untidy bed, when she paused suddenly and exclaimed—

" Why—whoever is that lady ? She's just come out of your study."

CHAPTER VII

TWO VISITORS

HER glance had turned towards the open study window, through which at that moment a tall woman in trailing black garments was passing into the garden; and as she came, John and Sylvia stood stock still on the terrace, looking at the tall figure walking slowly up the grass-grown path towards them.

"You must forgive me for my intrusion." A faltering voice, very low and vibrating with emotion, spoke the words; the speaker's face, very lovely, very sad, was lifted appealingly to the figure of the man that stood so still beside the bed of tangled weeds. "But I was passing through Marshdale, and I stopped to thank those kind, kind Ormondes and"—her voice quavered—"and I wanted to thank you, too, for coming to help me on that dreadful day when my husband——" Her voice trailed into silence, as though she found it impossible to finish her speech. Nina Danvers had by now made her way on to the lawn itself, and stood close to John and the child who looked at her silently with grave and wondering eyes.

"I think you had better go and weed that bed

under the wall," John said to Sylvia in his hardest voice, pointing to a distant corner of the garden. "This lady—wishes to speak to me. You go and do a good bit of weeding over there."

"All right," Sylvia said quickly, her eyes looking up for an instant with a gravely appraising and wondering glance into the face of the woman in black. "I'll do a big piece of weeding whilst you talk;" and she sped across the garden to the bed John had pointed out, leaving the man and woman on the terrace alone.

"I felt—I could not leave Marshdale a second time without saying thank-you to you."

"It is really quite unnecessary to say any thank-you," Camberley answered shortly, his face all the more set and flinty because of the turmoil of emotion excited in him by the sight of her loveliness. "It was quite a chance that I happened to be passing and was called in by Miss Ormonde. I had no choice in the matter."

"Oh! John!" The visitor's hands went out towards him, but he ignored them entirely. "I did not come only to say thank-you, though I do want to say it. I came partly to ask whether you would forgive. I am so lonely now. I felt as if I must have your forgiveness. And it has all been so terrible; such a shock—Archibald's death—the suddenness." Her words dropped jerkily and incoherently. "Somehow it would help me so much if I knew you would—be my friend again."

"I am afraid my friendship would be of very

little use to you." John's tones were brusque to the point of rudeness. "There could not be any question of such a thing, and I—do not think we need discuss the matter further. You have a carriage waiting for you?" He made a movement as though he would turn from the terrace and take her back to the house, but she put a restraining hand on his arm.

"Oh! I am sorry if I did wrong in coming," she said shakily, her eyes filling with tears. "It was impulsive of me to do it—perhaps it was silly of me, but I wanted so much to come. I wanted to thank you—I felt I must come to ask you to forgive me. I know now how abominably I treated you. I came for old sake's sake, John."

She dropped her voice almost to a whisper, but John shook her hand from his arm as though it had been a viper; and he would not meet her glance.

"I am afraid I do think you made a mistake in coming here," he said harshly, with a laugh that made his listener wince; "an appeal to old times does not move me in the least. For old sake's sake" —he laughed again—"there is something slightly humorous in your quotation of those words. I have no wish to be reminded of old times. I prefer that they should remain in oblivion. Let the dead past bury its dead, and the deeper the grave the better pleased I shall be. I have no wish to disturb it."

"And you won't even forgive?" Her voice was very vibrant and sweet. It awoke in his heart

tumultuous echoes of those days when he had thought it the sweetest sound in the world, and fierce longings and fierce resentment struggled for mastery within him. Her loveliness still gave him an insane wish to crush her in his arms and kiss her face; but that wish fought hard with the passion of anger which raged within his heart against this woman who had wrecked his happiness and his life; and the struggle was a very real one. With a great effort he restrained himself, and his voice was so icy that even the woman before him, versed as she was in knowledge of the world, had no conception of the tumult raging in his soul.

"No, I will never forgive you," he said. "Forgive? My God!" he burst out, "do you think it is an easy thing to ask a man to do—to forgive a woman who has killed the best in his soul and spirit and life? You expect too much! However, there is no need to be melodramatic." His passion died down, his tones relapsed once more into iciness. "The point need not be raised between us. I will take you to your carriage. There is no question of forgiveness. The subject is closed. It will never be re-opened. There is no longer a question of any relation, friendly or otherwise, between you and me. We are strangers—absolute strangers."

"Strangers—oh! John!" Nina began, but he put up his hand and checked her utterance.

"Strangers," he repeated firmly, and this time Nina did not answer. His stern coldness seemed to overawe her. She followed him meekly along

the path that was overgrown with weeds, and through the study to the front door, where the cab stood waiting to take her back to the station.

"You are very lonely here?" she said, as they stood on the threshold of the front door; and there was a new wistfulness in her voice, a wistfulness of which John was well aware, although he chose to ignore it.

"No, I am not lonely. I no longer live by myself," he said shortly, "I have my ward living with me; and where she is, nobody could be lonely. She is very good company."

"Good company?" Nina looked at him incredulously. "But your ward is only quite a little girl. At least, I conclude the little girl who was with you in the garden is your ward?"

"Yes—she is my ward—Sylvia Brentwood, the daughter of a very old friend. Quite true, she is only a little girl, but"—a little smile suddenly wavered over the stern face—"for all that she is a splendid companion and—friend." For the tick of a second his own eyes looked straight into Nina's face. "Where she is nobody could be lonely. She is the dearest, most companionable little soul."

"You are fortunate." Nina's words were tinged with asperity; she shook hands with him abruptly, and turned to enter the cab door held open for her by the shabby-looking driver. "I hope your companionable little soul will go on being sufficient for you."

"I hope so." John bowed gravely, and as he

went back into the house and walked slowly across the garden again, his own words haunted him: "Where she is nobody could be lonely." At the back of his mind he dimly realised that just because Sylvia was in the garden he went there and not into his study—whereas if this had happened a few weeks earlier, he would have shut himself up to rage in bitterness and solitude. But now he went out into the breezy loveliness of the May afternoon, and the sight of Sylvia in her blue overall, working vigorously amongst the bedful of weeds, checked the flood of bitter resentment that raged in his heart; rage and resentment seemed unsuitable in her gracious presence. As he came close to her the child lifted a flushed face, and panted out—

"It's most dreadful hard work pulling out these great strong weeds. They do seem to have got a firm hold. I never saw such great weeds in all my life."

"All the same those small hands of yours seem to have rather a capacity for pulling up weeds and other hurtful things," he said under his breath.

"Well—I rather like clearing up messes," Sylvia said, with her soft chuckle. "And this bed's a dreadful messy one. I thought p'raps that lady was a patient," she went on, "and I was glad. It's quite time we thought about looking up patients," she ended with old-fashioned quaintness, "and that lady would have made a good beginning."

"No, she wasn't a patient." John's face which had momentarily softened, hardened again. "What did you think of her, Sylvia?"

"She'd got a lovely face," the child said slowly, her brows drawn together in the frown which with her always intimated an effort to think out some problem. "I don't believe I ever saw a more lovely face. But she didn't make me want to love her straight away. Some people do. Some people make you feel all warm inside. She didn't, and I don't believe she would care very much for little girls."

"So you didn't want to love her straight away. She didn't make you feel warm inside"—into John's voice came a cynical note—"and yet you think she has a lovely face."

"Yes." The frown still lingered on Sylvia's forehead. "She made me think of a beautiful princess in a fairy tale; only I think she's a princess who hasn't got a heart, or only had an icicle where a heart should be—and she doesn't make me want to love her. P'raps she might some day if she tried very hard, but don't let's talk about her any more." Sylvia flung down her fork and thrust her hand through John's arm. "She's made your eyes look all funny, and there's lines on your face. Don't let's talk about her any more. Let's go on weeding, and making a place for our Sleeping Beauty."

But the afternoon was not destined to pass without another disturbance to John Camberley's peace of mind; for half an hour later, when, by dint of digging hard and being amused by Sylvia's prattle, he was beginning to feel a little smoothed,

he was summoned into the house by Mrs. Day.

"There's Miss Minton wishes to speak to you," the housekeeper said, a thundery expression on her face; "she says her business is important."

"*Cat!*" Mrs. Day remarked to the inoffensive animal of that species who sat by the kitchen fire, but it was obvious the word was not intended to apply to that sleek and harmless creature, "cat—that's what Miss Minton is. Didn't I know she was up to something nosin' about and wantin' to know this and wantin' to know that, when I met her in the street just after the child came—and now here she is to-day, coming to the house as impudent as you please, and askin' me a lot of impertinent questions about the little dear that's like sunshine in the house, and interfering where she's not wanted. I've no patience myself with old maids. They have no business of their own to attend to, so must needs be worrying themselves with other people's affairs. *Cat!*"

Whilst Mrs. Day was relieving her mind in the kitchen, John meanwhile found himself confronted by the subject of these remarks, a small woman of nondescript age and appearance and equally nondescript clothes,—Alice—the eldest of the Minton family. Her face was pinched and lined; her eyes had a habit of roving here, there and everywhere, which made John think of some inquisitive bird; and she had an alertness of manner which was also rather birdlike.

"You must forgive my intrusion, Dr. Camberley,"

she said; "it is a long time since we met, but I really felt it was my duty to come."

"Your duty?" John looked as bewildered as he felt.

"You see, the fact of the matter is, I do a good deal of parish work in the town, and I am very much interested in people, especially in young girls" ("Unlucky girls" was his listener's inward comment); "and I understand that a little girl has come to live with you, and that she does not go to school."

"My ward, Miss Sylvia Brentwood, lives here,' John replied stiffly, his face darkening, "and she does not go to school—the information you have received is quite correct; but I am quite at a loss to imagine in what way my ward's concerns can interest you." He had not invited his visitor to sit down; they stood facing one another in the consulting-room, John very stiff and upright, Miss Minton alert and brisk. "My ward does not go to school," John repeated, "but—what then?"

"Ah! that is the very point—what then?' Alice Minton answered with an attempt at archness which sat very oddly upon her, and her bright eyes fixed themselves upon John in a glance which she also intended to be arch and appealing; "it is just that point which induced me to call. I felt it to be my duty, as a woman and a social worker, to come and ask you whether you do not think it would be wise to let the little girl mix with other little girls? There are so many nice children in

Marshdale, and you will remember—I mean, you know perhaps how much interest I always take in children and in girls."

"Indeed?" John's tones were cuttingly sarcastic; he looked into the small pinched face as though he had never set eyes on it before, as though he and Alice Minton had not been fellow-inhabitants of Marshdale practically all their lives: and to the most total stranger he could not have spoken in a voice more distant and cold.

"Yes," she answered, obviously flustered by his chilling manner, "I have a great deal to do with girls. They get on well with me and I with them, and I have been thinking so much about your ward——"

"Thank you very much," John put in with deadly sarcasm.

"And I wondered," Miss Minton floundered hopelessly, "I thought—I mean—it does not seem quite suitable, quite fitting that a little girl should be brought up entirely by a young man and a housekeeper." Her words came out very stumblingly and incoherently, and John's face grew darker and more dark. "You will forgive me for coming—but I felt it my duty in the interests of the child to—to——"

"The interests of my ward are in my hands, where they were placed by her father," John interrupted sharply. "When I require help in managing my ward and her affairs, I am quite capable of asking for that help. May I say that I

consider any gratuitous advice that is offered me is a piece of unwarrantable impertinence—unwarrantable impertinence," he repeated, as he opened the door, and dismissed his visitor with a sarcastic smile.

CHAPTER VIII

THROUGH THE YEARS

"YOU see, I live with Mr. John."

"Oh! you live with Mr. John, and who is Mr. John?" Sylvia, sitting on a bench in the old churchyard which lay between Camberley's garden and the river, looked up at her questioner with the smile that gave such extraordinary charm to her face.

"Well—you see," she said confidentially, edging a little nearer to the man who had seated himself on the bench beside her and entered into conversation with her, "you see, really he ought to be a doctor, and have lots of patients. But the patients dropped away when he went to pieces, and somehow he hasn't picked up the pieces."

The stranger, a white-haired clergyman with singularly blue eyes and a singularly gentle face, smiled.

"Perhaps you and I can help him to pick them up; we must see about it," he said. "I have only just come to Marshdale. Everybody here is strange to me, but I am Rector of this church"—he indicated the grey old building on their right—"and if you live close here, you belong to my parish; so

you must tell me your name, and Mr. John's too, because you are both in my flock."

"I'm glad we're in your flock." Sylvia looked confidingly up into the kind eyes watching her. "Mrs. Day—that's our housekeeper—she said there was a new Rector, and I'm rather new myself. I've only been here quite a few weeks. Mrs. Day and I go to St. James' church down the town, because Mrs. Day didn't like this church. She said the old gentleman mumbled so she couldn't understand a word he said, but I expect it'll be quite different now you've come. I shouldn't think you'd mumble."

Again the stranger smiled at Sylvia's quaint reproduction of Mrs. Day's remarks, and the child ran on: "I'm Mr. John's ward. Dad and Mr. John were old friends, and when they were young they both went to the same hospital. My Dad was a doctor too, same as Mr. John—only Dad had lots of patients. I don't think he went to pieces like Mr. John did."

"I don't expect he did," the Rector answered; "and where did you live before you came to Marshdale? Before you were Mr. John's ward? You haven't told me Mr. John's other name, by the way!"

Sylvia laughed her clear amused laugh, and its infectious ring made the Rector laugh too.

"I believe I've got my brain muzzy, like Mrs. Day says hers is when she forgets things," the child exclaimed. "Mr. John is really Dr. Cam-

berley, and his house is in Draper Street, just at the top of the lane. Mrs. Day lets me come down here to the churchyard sometimes, and into the meadows. She says it makes a change from the garden."

"But even now you haven't told me your name or where you lived before you came here," her companion said, and again Sylvia laughed.

"My tongue gets running on, doesn't it?" she said, with another unconscious imitation of Mrs. Day. "My name's Sylvia Brentwood, and I used to live in South Africa with Dad, until he died. I can't remember what my mother was like; she died when I was a teeny baby, so it was always just Dad and me, and now it's Mr. John and me."

"And does Mr. John go to St. James' church too? Did he not care for the Rector who mumbled?"

"Sometimes Mr. John comes to church too—only he says he's got a bit out of the way of it, and he doesn't feel like it often. I call him Mr. John because he's my guardian, and I love him better than anybody in the world. I suppose"—Sylvia hesitated and her voice grew very wistful—"I suppose you couldn't tell people about him wanting patients, could you? We do want to get the patients together again. It's rather bad for Mr. John not to have any. And you can't think what a dear he is, only he's got disheartened." Henry Symonds looked into Sylvia's grey eyes, and looking into them, he reflected what a tender heart lay behind them.

"The child is a born mother," he thought; "she is bound to be always taking care of somebody or something." Aloud he answered—

"We must see what can be done; I will think it over and try to help. But I think, if I were you, I wouldn't say anything to Mr. John about our having talked over it. Let it be a splendid secret between you and me, a splendid surprise for Mr. John."

Sylvia clasped her hands ecstatically.

"A splendid surprise when we get the patients for him?" she exclaimed. "Oh! that would be just simply lovely! I like secrets that turn out splendid surprises. Sometimes Dad and I used to have them, when we wanted to do things for Mrs. Tedworth—our neighbour. And I should think"—she looked earnestly into her new friend's face—"I should think you could keep a secret."

"I believe I can. I think you may trust me."

"You've got such kind eyes," Sylvia went on; "the very first thing I saw when you sat down here was that you had such kind eyes. There was a lady who came to see Mr. John once—oh! it was not long after I first came—and her eyes weren't kind, even though she was lovely like a princess. But yours are kind, and I should think you liked little girls."

The wistfulness in her voice did not escape the Rector's ears.

"Yes, I like little girls very much," he said, "and I am glad we met here to-day. Perhaps you will come and see me at the Rectory, if Mr.

John will allow you. I must call and ask him to spare you some time."

"Oh! my goodness, I should like to come." Sylvia was nearly breathless with delight. "I suppose you haven't any little girls of your own that I could play with, have you?" she added with hope in her voice. A shadow crossed the kindly eyes.

"No—I have no little girls—now," he said gently. "Once upon a time I had a little daughter—about as big as you are, but she and her mother are both waiting for me in Paradise."

"I hope they know Daddy there," Sylvia said softly. "I'd like him to have another little girl to be loving to him now he hasn't got me any more. And I'll be your friend if you like," she added.

"I should like it very much." Henry Symonds' smile flashed out again, and it was a very winning smile. "I daresay you have a great many friends."

"Well, not so many as I should like," she answered with a shake of the head. "I should like ever such a number, but you see Mr. John doesn't know hardly any people, and he doesn't much approve of me having a lot of friends. I think he's got his own views about bringing me up," she added; "still, I've got *some* friends—and I do like people better than anything else in the world, don't you? What I like best is loving people and doing things for them. Mr. John lets me go and see the people that live in the lane there"—she nodded towards the row of houses that ran past the churchyard wall towards the meadows and the river—"and

they're every one of them my friends. Old Betty she's got the rheumatism something cruel, and Mr. John gave me some stuff to take to her when I told him about it; and Mrs. Henidge she's awfully worried about the twins because they don't seem to get on, and so Mr. John lets me take them milk every day; and Mrs. Tranley can't seem to get her sick daughter any better, but I expect she'll do now, because Mrs. Day and me are making wonderful strong soup for her."

The blue eyes watching the child's eager face grew a little misty, as she poured forth her tale, couched partly in her own language, partly in that of the cottagers; and a smile hovered over his lips, as he looked away from her and across the meadowlands basking in the afternoon sunlight of July.

"The people in those cottages are my parishioners," he said; "I want to make friends with them all, too. Perhaps sometimes you and I could go together to see them, and in any case you must come and have tea at the Rectory, if Mr. John will give leave; and when you come, we will talk about our secret and our splendid surprise."

That same evening Henry Symonds wended his way from his own Rectory just above the little grey church and the churchyard that sloped to the meadows, and called upon the Rev. Thomas Ransom, Vicar of St. James, the identical church which Mrs. Day and Sylvia had attended on Sundays during the reign of the mumbling Rector of St. Luke's. To Henry Symonds—gentle, unconventional, and

simple—Thomas Ransom was not particularly congenial, but he was a very old resident of Marshdale, and the newcomer had more than once gone to St. James' Vicarage for information and help. Mr. Ransom's stiff and orderly study always gave Henry Symonds an odd feeling of being back again at school in the presence of his house-master, and indeed there was more than a little of the pedagogue in Thomas Ransom's manner and appearance; and his greeting to the other clergyman lacked warmth and geniality.

"I shall be glad to do anything I can to help you," he said in his rather pompous voice. "Marshdale is not a very easy place for a newcomer. There are several sets here, and one has to be careful about them. People do not like overlapping, and one must not offend their susceptibilities. Cliques are difficult to manage."

"I should like to see them totally abolished," the Rector of St. Luke's answered, with a twinkle in his blue eyes; "a clique is a deadly affair."

"Ah! well, well, one must go slowly, and not offend prejudices. After all, in a small place we do not wish people to tread on one another's toes, and we are bound to consider the views of different classes. One does not desire an undue mixture of classes; it never answers."

"I wonder why," Symonds answered with apparent innocence, "and I wonder what precisely is meant by an undue mixture of classes. I should be inclined to think that the more classes drew

together and understood one another, the better in every possible way."

"I do not agree with you." Over Thomas Ransom's florid, rather hard face there crept an expression of obstinacy. "There are certain barriers wisely erected by those who went before us—barriers which in my opinion would be most injudicious for us to throw down. Possibly you are a Radical?" he added, speaking very much as if he were alluding to a peculiarly venomous reptile.

"Politics are not very much in my line"—Henry Symonds smiled his disarming smile—"but I feel we lay too much stress on the differences between human beings, and not enough on the likenesses. I have very little belief in creating barriers."

"You wish to level everybody into a deadly equality, I suppose?" There was a sneer in Mr. Ransom's voice, but the other man paid no heed to the sneer.

"Equality is for ever impossible," he answered gently, "but I should like as few barriers as need be, and as many equal opportunities for all as can be managed. But I did not come to worry you with abstract questions. I thought perhaps you could tell me something of a parishioner of mine, Dr. Camberley."

"Let me advise you to keep clear of young Camberley," Mr. Ransom said, breaking into the other's speech. "Old Dr. Camberley, this man's father, was well known here, and much respected; no one could have breathed a syllable against him. But

the young man has gone to the dogs—simply gone to the dogs; it has been a disgraceful business, and the less any decent people have to do with him the better."

"And is there no way of getting him back from the dogs? They cannot be very pleasant companions," Henry Symonds answered gently, with again a twinkle of humour in his eyes; "and if decent folks all ávoid the poor man, how can he pull up into decency again?"

"No one would ever succeed in reforming John Camberley," was the grim rétort. "I consider him a hopeless subject."

"Can one say anybody is hopeless?" Symonds' tone, though gentle, had in it a ring of sternness. "What went wrong with this particular man? I gather he once had a practice here. He did not go to the dogs gratuitously out of sheer wickedness, did he? What sent him there?"

"Oh! he had a practice—he was doing well. He was engaged to a lady who lived away from here; and from what we hear, though we never heard very much, the lady threw him over at the last moment. That was the beginning of his downfall."

"Poor fellow!" Symonds murmured.

"I don't pity him," Mr. Ransom said austerely. "No doubt the lady found he was not worthy of her. There was probably a good reason for her conduct. In any case, after that incident John Camberley went to the dogs. He has lived in the

most reckless, shameless way ever since, and his practice has very naturally dropped away. As for the unfortunate child who is in his care, I can only pity her from the bottom of my heart."

"The child seems very happy." Symonds' tones were dry.

"Happy?" Mr. Ransom almost glared at his visitor. "But what sort of upbringing can she have from that evil liver? A most estimable worker in my parish, Miss Minton, was so upset at the thought of the education the poor little child would receive in Camberley's house, that she actually called there to implore him to allow her to be properly taught, and the man simply insulted her."

"Possibly he resented interference about a child who was his legal ward."

"Resent?" Mr. Ransom nearly snorted. "What right has an outcast like Camberley to resent anything respectable people do to help him? Take my advice—have nothing to do with him. Not to mention his own life for the last few years, he has never been able to explain why poor old Henderson died. Henderson's death was gross negligence, or something worse. It was certainly inexplicable. The old man was very ill, and though Camberley vowed he had sent the right medicine for him, his daughter—a most eminently trustworthy and respectable woman—declared that no medicine had come; and in consequence the old man died. The coroner was very severe upon Camberley for his neglect and carelessness, very severe

indeed; he was living the wildest life at the time and no doubt forgot the medicine, and since then, naturally no one has employed him. He would have done better to leave Marshdale. His staying here is monstrous—perfectly monstrous. He has simply tried to brazen the affair out, but he has gained nothing by doing it."

Perhaps Henry Symonds had seen more of the world than the Rev. Thomas Ransom; perhaps a long life of labour in a great London parish had taught him much tolerance, much forbearance, much love; and as he walked slowly homewards along the path by the river fringed with meadow sweet, and willow herb, and soft purple vetches, one thought was uppermost in his mind.

"Will a child's small hand draw John Camberley back from the dogs? I wonder." And as he watched the swallows skimming over the meadows, and the rooks wheeling round the elms against a background of daffodil sky, the old, old words haunted him like a refrain.

"'A little child shall lead them'—a little child!"

CHAPTER IX

EVA

THE life that Sylvia led was a strange one, an oddly unchildlike life, but by no means unhappy. Lessons with Mr. John; rapturous hours of gardening; needlework, not quite so rapturous, under the eagle eye of Mrs. Day; minute instruction from the same worthy as to all those things which a little lady should do, or should leave undone; visits to her poor friends in the lane, and occasional happy afternoons at the Rectory: these made up the sum of the child's existence, varied by walks with John, or shopping with Mrs. Day.

When she asked to be allowed to go to the Rectory, John made no objection; but he had not been at home when Henry Symonds one day called upon him, and when on his return he found the newcomer's card in the hall, he tore it up with a derisive laugh.

"A caller? Good Heavens!—the poor benighted man doesn't know Marshdale and its gossip," he said grimly. "I won't return the visit, and give the good gentleman the discomfort of dropping me afterwards."

He was as good as his word, he did not return the Rector's call; but Sylvia was allowed perfect freedom to go to the Rectory when she would, and she often found her way across the churchyard and the lane to the red gabled house set back in its well-kept garden. The gentle Rector and the loving-hearted child had very much in common; and the old man passed on to Sylvia much of the knowledge of flowers, and birds, and all living creatures, which even in his London parish he had never allowed himself to forget.

Fairy books, too, he put into her hands, the books which had once belonged to little daughters of his own who lay sleeping in a huge London cemetery; and on some days Sylvia lived in a world peopled entirely by princes and princesses, fiery dragons and cruel stepmothers, a world in which John Camberley's garden became an enchanted forest, and John himself the unfortunate prince held in durance vile by a mighty enchanter.

"And some day the enchanter will get killed, and the garden will blossom, and the sleeping beauty will wake, and we'll all live happily ever after," she would murmur, as she walked slowly up and down the terrace under the South wall, giving words to her imagination in a crooning sing-song voice. "It's just what Mr. John and me planned together. There's a Sleeping Beauty in the bed there." At this point her voice would drop to a whisper. "And though we've cleared away all the weeds, still she's asleep, sound asleep. But she'll wake some day,

she'll awake when the Prince comes stepping over the grass to kiss her, and all will be well!"

She was a happy little soul, the smallest pleasures pleased her; and "doing things," as she expressed it, which invariably meant doing things for other people, gave her joy. She sang in her clear little voice all about the dull old house, and in the garden where the look of neglect was gradually giving place to something more orderly; and John had grown to love the sound of her singing, and of her small feet pattering to and fro.

During her first autumn days at Marshdale she made one other friend, and she met her in the same apparently chance way in which she had met Henry Symonds. One afternoon after taking some beef tea to one of her protégées, she sauntered down the lane, and was standing by the wooden bridge that spanned the river, looking into the clear water, and dreaming some of her fairy dreams, when a voice calling, "Bari! Bari!" startled her into a realisation of her surroundings. A girl was walking across the meadows on the far side of the bridge—a girl in a green gown that trailed over the flowering grasses—a girl who, as she came, called to a great St. Bernard dog roving here and there at his own sweet will.

"Bari," she said, "oh! Bari, you sinner, you will terrify the ducks, you monster of wickedness!" and as she reached the bridge and the dog bounded up to her, she slipped her hand through his collar and gave his big head a playful shake. "You know

90276

you are so gigantic, you wicked one," she went on, her eyes looking down into the dog's brown eyes; "you forget your size and frighten everybody and everything when you go bounding about like an awkward great calf." And at that moment her eyes fell on the small figure watching her on the other side of the bridge.

"He is such a dear, and such a sinner," she said in response to the smile on Sylvia's face; "he is still only a puppy, and he loves doing naughty puppy things. He likes tearing up to people, and putting his huge paws on them, and he frightens them nearly into fits. He really wouldn't hurt a fly on purpose, only he looks so big and alarming."

"He's got a beautiful face," Sylvia answered, putting her arms round the dog's neck and laying her cheek for an instant against his rough head. "I should think he was the sort of dog a princess would have, shouldn't you? But p'raps"—she paused, and the dreamy look came back to her eyes—"p'raps you are a princess—a really and truly princess. I believe you are."

"You most quaint person, what makes you think I am a really and truly princess?"

"Because your face is lovely like a princess, and you've got eyes that make one feel all rested and comfy inside: and you wear green, like princesses do."

She edged very close to her new acquaintance, and one hand stroked the green gown, whilst the other rested on Bari's head.

"I expect you've got a princess' name," she went on, her eyes fixed on the girl's smiling face.

"I don't know about that; but you shall tell me what you think. My name is Ormonde—Eva Ormonde."

"It's a very nice name; I should almost think it was a princess' name," Sylvia said gravely; "my name is Sylvia—Sylvia Brentwood, and I live with Dr. Camberley—Mr. John I call him. He's my guardian."

"Dr. Camberley?" The girl glanced curiously at the child. "Why, it was Dr. Camberley who came and helped us last April when there was an accident at our house. He was very kind."

"He's always very kind; he's one of the kindest people I ever knew." Sylvia spoke from the vast stores of experience of ten years. "Excepting Daddy, I never loved anybody as much as I do Mr. John. I think he's a very lovable person."

The tenderness in the childish voice made Eva smile.

"He's very lovable, is he?" she said gently; "that is nice for you if he is your guardian."

"Yes; it's ever so nice for me, and I love him ever such a lot. But he isn't very happy. Often he looks sad, and his eyes hurt me when they're sad. I wish you were a really and truly princess, p'raps then you could help him."

"Ah! but I'm not a really and truly princess," Eva answered, a flame of colour flashing into her face—a colour that came with the thought of how

often, since that April day, she had remembered the tall young doctor with the sad eyes; "I am only just an ordinary everyday girl; I don't see how I could help. I have been away all the summer, and I expect that is why I have never seen you before, little Sylvia."

"Well, you see, I don't go about much, and I know very few people." Sylvia's hand crept along the white gown and touched Eva's hand. "Mr. John keeps himself to himself—that's what Mrs. Day says; and we don't have anybody coming to the house. Mr. John doesn't care much for people. Besides Mr. John and Mrs. Day, I've only got one other great friend, that's the Rector; and I'm friends with the people in the lane. I suppose"—she hesitated and grew crimson—"I suppose you have all the friends you want already?" There was a great wistfulness in her eyes, and Eva saw and understood that wistfulness.

"I always have room in my heart for new friends," Eva answered, after an infinitesimal pause, a pause brought about by the shrinking sense that she would not like to do anything that might seem like pushing herself into John Camberley's notice. "Do you want me for a friend, little Sylvia?"

"I should rather think I did." Sylvia spoke ecstatically. "When I saw you come stepping over the meadows, I thought you were the loveliest princess I'd ever dreamt of, and I shouldn't think Mr. John would want to keep himself to himself if he knew you," she added, her adoring gaze fixed

on the girl's face. "I should think he'd like us all to be friends together. Please let me be your friend, and you be mine."

"You mustn't do anything Mr. John wouldn't like," Eva Ormonde said gently, angry with herself because her heart-beats quickened at the child's words. "I will write to Dr. Camberley and ask if he would allow you to come and see me. I live just outside the town, and my sister was married last month, and my brother is away a great deal, so that I am often by myself. I will write and ask if you may come. I think perhaps he would not mind your coming to see me sometimes."

"And oh! please may I?" Sylvia said breathlessly, when, having hurried home after a further talk with Eva, she burst into John's study to tell him the whole story from beginning to end—"please may I go and be her friend? She makes me think of a really and truly princess, and she has eyes—I don't know how to explain her eyes, but they are the kind of eyes that mothers have!"

CHAPTER X

"LET THEM SAY"

EVA and her big dog walked slowly back across the meadows after their encounter with Sylvia, and Bari found himself at liberty to roam much further afield than usual, unrebuked. His young mistress scarcely paid any attention to his wanderings, and he plunged into the little crystal streams that bubbled up amongst the long grass, chased water rats, and raced after any low-flying bird, without attracting her attention in the remotest degree. Eva's mind, indeed, was so intent upon the small girl she had left beside the bridge, that for the time being Bari and his vagaries were relegated to the background of her mind; and the riotous puppy made the very best of his opportunities. Sometimes, as she walked along the path by the river, Eva smiled, as she recalled some of Sylvia's quaint phrases, and the adoring look in the grey eyes that had looked at her with such eager admiration; and then again her face fell into serious lines as she recalled the child's words about her guardian's sadness, and as her own memory brought back to her the remembrance of John Camberley's brief visit to the Meadow House six months earlier.

Even in all the turmoil and upset of Mr. Danvers' sudden illness, Eva had noticed the sadness in the young doctor's eyes, the stern lines of his face, the bitterness that crept out in his words, and often during those intervening months her thoughts had gone back to that April day, and she had found herself speculating upon the why and the wherefore of the sadness and the bitterness. The whole tragic episode of the Danvers' visit, ending in the death of Mr. Danvers a few hours after she had summoned Camberley's aid, had left a deep impression on the girl's sensitive mind, and John himself had ever since stood out as a prominent figure in her memory.

And for some reason which she could not, and did not attempt to explain, she had disliked intensely the covert sneers and innuendoes thrown out by Dr. Jennings in speaking of the younger doctor. Walking back across the meadows in the afternoon light, Eva's mind went back to those days in April, and picture after picture painted itself again before her mental vision. The Danvers' arrival, her own admiration for the beautiful well-dressed woman, an admiration mixed with a certain sense of shrinking; Mr. Danvers' sudden illness, and her own headlong rush to the gate. All these came first, and then that strange scene in the library with the dying man as its centre, the beautiful woman crouching in the armchair, and the doctor with the sad eyes and bitter mouth looking down at her with such a scathing glance of surprise and scorn. Eva, standing in the background, had seen all these things with a feeling

of odd detachment, and now they all came back to her with a vividness at which she herself was surprised.

She had noticed the contemptuous glance cast at Camberley by Dr. Jennings on his arrival; she had seen, without understanding it, the look on the face of the younger doctor when he went quietly out of the room, and something in that look had made her heart ache almost intolerably. Then had come the hours of waiting for death, when the stranger who had merely come to view their house as a possible summer residence, had passed quietly away out of unconsciousness into the sleep that knows no waking.

But at Eva's next remembrance she winced a little, and for a moment she paused on the path, and looked out across the meadows, regardless of Bari and his antics. She was back again in the big room at the Meadow House, trying her youthful best to comfort the woman whose husband had just died. The abandonment of grief to which Mrs. Danvers gave way, had at the time shocked and surprised her reticent young hostess; and although Eva had told herself over and over again that of course she was no judge of what a widow's feelings would be, and that such wild grief must imply a great love, nevertheless the remembrance of Nina Danvers in those first hours of her widowhood, still had power to make her wince, and she had never been able to rid herself of the impression that all Mrs. Danvers' demonstrations of sorrow had not

the ring of sincerity. Then, too, the newly made widow had spoken such wild words in which remorse had seemed to mingle with her grief, remorse for some bygone episode the nature of which she did not explain. And all this had been a fresh puzzle and bewilderment to Eva. Indeed, those days had all been like a nightmare, and although their long sojourn in Switzerland, and her sister's wedding, had for a time blurred the vividness of the remembrance, her return to Marshdale and her meeting with Sylvia had re-awakened the old thoughts and impressions.

Why had Dr. Camberley looked at Mrs. Danvers with such a glance of contempt? Why had Mrs. Danvers, when she was passing through Marshdale in May, alluded to him with a sigh and an inscrutable look as an old and dear friend? His treatment of her had scarcely been that of an old and dear friend! And why was little Sylvia's guardian so friendless a man? All these thoughts, and many more akin to them, raced through Eva's mind whilst Bari tore over the meadows and enjoyed himself to his heart's content.

Fragments of Marshdale gossip about John Camberley drifted vaguely into Eva's mind, but she could not piece the fragments together with any satisfactory result. Gossip was very alien to her loving, kindly nature, and it had a habit of going into one ear and out of the other, leaving little trace behind! So that beyond a vague idea that Camberley was not liked in the town, and that

there were stories against him, she was ignorant of the reasons why he was scorned and practically boycotted. But she had never been able to forget the traces of misery drawn upon his face, and the sadness in his eyes. And there came to her now, as there had come often before during those weeks amongst the Swiss mountains, a little shy longing to be able to do something for the doctor with the grimly set lips, and the air of belonging to nobody and caring for nobody.

"Not that there is likely to be any way in which I could help him, is there, Bari, my dear?" she said softly to her big dog, when, exhausted with his futile rushes after unattainable birds, he ambled along beside her, "and I'm dreadfully afraid he may think me pushing and horrid, for suggesting to his little ward that she should come and see me. Only—she seemed such a lonely little mite, and I believe she wants mothering. I could not resist her."

Bari looked up at his mistress with wise eyes that seemed to express entire sympathy and understanding. It pleased his doggy soul when she talked to him in those grave confidential tones. His tail flopped heavily with appreciative pleasure; he pressed his big head against her hand in a mute caress.

"Yes, I knew you would agree with me." Eva glanced down at him with a smile. "You are a lovely friend, Bari. You always understand, and you never argue. Now I don't wish to push myself into Dr. Camberley's acquaintance, if he does not

want to have any friend, even though I think he must be making a mistake in holding aloof from everybody. Still, I daresay he knows his own business best; but I don't think he does." Again her smile flashed out—and there was a very engaging quality about Eva Ormonde's smile. "I should not like it at all, if he thought I was intruding or interfering impertinently. And yet I do want to be friendly to the little girl who thought I was a princess! I wonder if I could write him a very diplomatic note, and ask her to tea."

Bari, with all his sympathy, was not quite able to give an answer to this question, or to judge upon a matter of such subtlety; but when Noel Ormonde came back from town that afternoon, Eva told him the story of her meeting with Sylvia, and asked for his advice.

"The child made an immense appeal to me," she said, looking at her brother with pleading eyes; "she is the pluckiest, dearest little soul, quite evidently making the very best of all that comes to her; but I could somehow read between the lines that she occasionally needs some other human society beyond that of her guardian and the housekeeper. Did you ever hear such a queer pathetic thing as those two men—Dr. Camberley and the Rector educating a child between them?"

"My dear girl, you were born with such a taste for putting your fingers into other people's pies that I wouldn't stop you for the world!" Noel said. "No, I don't mean that your fingers are the

interfering kind," he added, catching a distressed look in his sister's eyes, " but you are just one of the helpers of this world. You are bound to be always doing something for somebody. You would not be you if you were not doing it," he went on affectionately. " They say the world is made up of those who give, and of those who get. You are very emphatically amongst those who give. You give of yourself royally to every one who demands anything of you." Her brother's whole-hearted praise brought a flush of pleasure to Eva's face, but she shook her head.

" You are a dear to say it," she said, " but it's a fearful exaggeration. Of course I love helping people, but then there is nothing wonderful about that. And the small Sylvia is rather irresistible. She has such a dear little way with her."

" I fancy there are rather queer reports in the town about Dr. Camberley," Noel said doubtfully. " I have not paid much attention to them. They didn't concern us, and we are such comparatively newcomers. But it is certain the rest of Marshdale has a very considerable dislike to him."

" All the more reason his little ward should have some friends to be nice to her," Eva said stoutly, " even if there is anything real against Dr. Camberley—and I daresay more than half the gossip is the invention of those dreadful scandalmongers in the town ; but even if there is a fragment of truth in it, poor little Sylvia is not to blame."

" No, old girl, that's true enough." Noel,

stretched at full length upon the deck chair in the verandah, flicked the end off his cigarette and looked thoughtfully at his sister. "All the same, you don't want, and I don't want you, to get mixed up with anybody who is looked upon by the world in general as a queer fish, and tabooed accordingly."

For a moment Eva did not answer. She leant forward, her elbows on her knees, her face between her hands, her eyes looking out across the garden over which the shadows of the October evening were falling softly.

"Because I try to be kind to little Sylvia Brentwood, I need not have anything to do with Sylvia's guardian," she said slowly at last. "I don't suppose I should ever set eyes on him. The child could easily come to me here. Dr. Camberley's house is quite this end of Draper Street; it would not be too far for her to walk alone."

"Oh! no." There was still a doubtful note in Noel's voice. "This road is so quiet, it would be safe enough for the child to come alone, if she is to come at all. Only"—he paused, and glanced across at the delicate outlines of his sister's face, silhouetted against the green of the evening sky—"only, I don't want you to be mixed up with anything or anybody about whom there has been gossip."

"You dear old boy." Eva put out a hand and touched her brother's arm caressingly. "I understand exactly what you feel about it, but—do you think we need regulate our own behaviour by the Marshdale code? Even supposing there is any-

thing really to be said against Dr. Camberley, that does not prevent his ward from being a very lonely child. In fact, if there is any real foundation for the feeling against her guardian, it seems all the more reason why somebody should put out a helping hand to little Sylvia. To taboo her seems so very unfair."

"The world has a way of being unfair." Noel laughed. "But of course I entirely agree with your point of view, my dear. It is hard luck that a perfectly innocent child should be made to suffer for the actions of a man who is not even a relation! There is no question of the sins of the fathers in her case; apparently her own father was a blameless enough individual."

"I never heard a word against him. The few people who have mentioned Dr. Camberley's ward to me, hvae simply said that the child was left in his care by an old friend; and they have always implied that the old friend could have had no knowledge of Dr. Camberley and of his doings—otherwise Sylvia would have been left in other hands. That is the way local gossip tells the story."

"And about Camberley himself, what have you heard?" Noel's eyes came back from a survey of the garden, and looked at Eva.

"Nothing very definite." Eva felt grateful to the twilight which hid her mounting colour. "I always try not to listen to gossip if I can possibly help it. But I have not been able to help hearing vague scraps here and there. I believe Dr. Cam-

berley was jilted, heartlessly jilted by some girl a few years ago; and after that he got very reckless. And there was a vague rumour about some man having died, and Dr. Camberley being blamed for it. But I never paid any real attention to that, for I don't believe, however reckless he was, he would deliberately let a person die."

"I've only seen the fellow a few times, but it certainly struck me he looked pretty hard and bitter—there was nothing of the villain type about him."

"The villain type?" Eva echoed indignantly. "Of course not—how absurd! Excepting on that day he came here to Mr. Danvers I have only seen Dr. Camberley occasionally, but there is certainly nothing villainous about him!"

"You speak very confidently." Noel stretched himself and laughed again, and again Eva was glad that the gathering shadows fell deepest at her end of the verandah. "You haven't ever said ten words to the man, I suppose!"

"Not much more than that," she answered, speaking lightly in response to his mood. "I only spoke to him when he came here that dreadful day. But though I scarcely know him, still I don't believe there is any villain in him. I should say he felt bitter about everything, and inclined to hit out at anybody just because he feels sore. If people have been snubbing him and avoiding him, no wonder he doesn't feel very amiable to humanity in general. But I don't believe he is a bad man."

"You have made up your mind very decidedly."

"Quite decidedly about that particular point." In Eva's voice was a note of certainty. "But, Noel, setting Dr. Camberley's goodness or badness aside, surely I might ignore the stupid chatter of a place like Marshdale, and do my best to help that very dear little girl?"

"You mean to do it, eh! old lady?"

"I *want* to do it." Eva's laugh echoed her brother's. "And I also want to ignore scandal which may be untrue, and is certainly unkind. And oh! Noel, I do believe in doing the obviously right and kindly thing regardless of what people may say. What does it matter what they say, as long as we are giving some help to another fellow-creature—and such a dear little fellow-creature too?" she added, with a remembrance of Sylvia's adoring grey eyes and gracious ways.

"'They say—What say they—Let them say,'" Noel quoted lazily. "Well, my dear, conventionality has never been much in my line, or in yours; and far be it from me to urge you to hold aloof from that unlucky kid if you feel you ought to do something for her. And I believe you are right in the main about the wisdom of ignoring gossip, and going one's own way in spite of it."

"Then I will tell you my plan." Eva spoke eagerly. "I thought I ought in all courtesy to write a note to Dr. Camberley, asking him whether his ward might come and see me sometimes, and suggesting that perhaps she and I might do a little

reading or needlework together. And if he agrees, Sylvia and I will soon be able to settle details." There was a mischievous glee in her voice, and her brother chuckled.

"You and your Sylvia will probably be able to lead that unlucky guardian of hers completely by the nose," he said, flinging away the end of his cigarette, and pulling himself lazily out of his deck chair. "Considering your mild and gentle appearance, Eva, my dear, you have a most surprising amount of determination and grit—or both. There is something of the bull-dog about you; I'm ready to swear that when you have once got hold of this Sylvia you have set your heart upon, you won't let her go in a hurry."

"No, I don't think I shall let her go in a hurry," Eva answered with a smile. "If her guardian allows me to have her, I shall not let her go again."

Eva found the letter she presently compiled an exceedingly difficult one to write; and various abortive efforts were torn up and flung into the paper basket, before her ideas finally found suitable expression. She scolded herself roundly for finding it so hard to word what she repeatedly declared in her own mind was "a perfectly ordinary note." But John Camberley's sad eyes and bitter smile continually thrust themselves between her and that same "ordinary note," and her first fear lest he should imagine she was trying to push herself into his notice, hampered her natural simplicity. But a no less natural quality of common sense came

at last to the rescue. "You are a perfect goose, Eva Ormonde," she exclaimed firmly and aloud, in the silence of her own sanctum, "Dr. Camberley took no more notice of you the day he was here, than he did of the chairs and tables. All you have to remember is that Sylvia is a lonely little girl and needs you. Don't let any other idea come into your head."

CHAPTER XI

JOHN'S REPLY

THE letter came to John at breakfast time next morning, and before he opened it he looked with curiosity at the neat, clear handwriting. Letters in the Draper Street household were very few and far between, and the writing on this particular envelope was quite strange to John; he turned it over and opened it with a slight stirring of interest.

"THE MEADOW HOUSE,
"*October* 2.

"DEAR DOCTOR CAMBERLEY,—

"I met your little ward Sylvia in the fields today, and she and I made friends. She has such charming ways and is such a dear little girl, I wonder whether you would allow her to come and see me sometimes? It would be a great pleasure to me. Now that my sister is married I am a good deal alone, and I think little Sylvia and I would get on very well together.

"Yours sincerely,
"EVA ORMONDE."

John looked across the table at Sylvia, who, to

her great joy and satisfaction, was allowed to pour out her guardian's coffee.

"This is a note from the lady you met yesterday —Miss Ormonde," he said, with the smile that since Sylvia's coming had grown less rare. "She asks me, what she also asked you, whether you may go to her house sometimes."

The colour ran over Sylvia's face. She clasped her hands ecstatically.

"And oh! please may I?" she exclaimed. "I do want to go; she makes me think of really and truly princesses, and I do want to see her home."

"You and she seem to have taken to one another." The smile still lingered on John's face. "She wants to make friends with you, and you want to make friends with her."

"I do. I do most dreadfully." Sylvia's eyes grew dark with earnestness. "I haven't ever had a friend quite like her, and I don't believe she would teach me anything you wouldn't like, even though you don't usually much like ladies to teach me," she ended. John laughed outright.

"No, I don't suppose you would learn anything you had better not learn from the woman who wrote this letter." He glanced again at the written page in his hand. "And I daresay it would be better for you to see something of what a lady ought to be. Mrs. Day and I, even with the Rector's help, can't do everything that ought to be done. I expect I was a fool to imagine we could." He said the last words under his breath, but Sylvia hearing them,

clambered down from her chair and went to his side.

"You weren't ever a fool," she said emphatically, laying her small hands upon his hand. "You take better care of me than anybody could; and you teach me better; and nobody could make me more happy." John's arm went round her, and for an instant he rested his head against the dusky softness of her hair.

"You are a blessèd little comforter," he said. "I do my best to give you the sort of upbringing you ought to have. But a man's a clumsy sort of fellow at that sort of thing." He put her a little away from him and looked into her small eager face.

"I don't think you're a clumsy fellow." Her eyes were lifted lovingly to his. "You're just what Dad wanted for me, and just what I want for myself. Only"—a little wistfulness crept into her voice—"only I think Miss Ormonde would make such a lovely friend, and she has eyes like mothers have." The repetition of her former phrase struck pathetically upon her listener's ear; his hand touched her hair with a caressing touch.

"I believe Miss Ormonde will be exactly the right friend for you," he said gently. "We will go and call upon her to-day, you and I together, and thank her for her letter, and find out just what she suggests, and what she would like. It was a very kind thought of hers, a very kind thought indeed."

"Eyes like mothers have." The phrase recurred to John's mind that afternoon, when he and Sylvia

were ushered into the drawing-room of the Meadow House, and Eva Ormonde rose to greet them. The child was right—Sylvia certainly was right. The girl in the green gown, the girl whose years could not number more than twenty-four or twenty-five, had restful eyes, just the restful eyes with which her own mother had looked at him: and when Eva smiled, his grave face relaxed into an answering smile.

The white house standing back from the road, the sweep up to the front door, the wide, comfortable hall—all these had brought vividly back to him that spring day when he had been so hurriedly summoned here to help a dying man, the day when, for the first time since her marriage, he had found himself face to face again with Nina. But the memory of the girl who had summoned him into the house on that tragic occasion had long since faded from his mind; and Eva Ormonde as she crossed the drawing-room to greet him, was to all intents and purposes as much a stranger as though he had never seen her before. Her restful eyes and the gentle graciousness of her manner pleased him; and something in the peaceful atmosphere of the big room gave him also a sense of having drifted with his small ward, into a haven of refuge. The tints of the carpet, curtains and chintzes were all soft and subdued; the furniture, though old-fashioned, had obviously been chosen by people of taste and refinement; and John judged, and judged rightly, that it had come to the Ormondes as an

inheritance from their old home. The room was fragrant with flowers, there were books everywhere, and, like the furniture, the pictures that hung on the walls also gave a sense of culture and refinement. And the girl who had greeted her visitor with a pretty graciousness of manner seemed to match her surroundings. With all her sweetness there was a dignity about her which, in spite of his dislike and contempt for her sex in general, gave John Camberley a feeling of pleasure.

"After I had posted my letter to you," she said, "I was afraid I had perhaps done a very impertinent thing. But I am sometimes impetuous, and you may have thought that, almost a stranger as I am, I was taking a great liberty in writing to you at all about your ward." She smiled down at Sylvia, and the child's answering smile was radiant with loving adoration.

"I did not think you impertinent at all." John himself wondered vaguely why he was speaking without his usual stiffness, in frank tones that bordered on friendliness. "It was very kind of you to think of Sylvia."

"I should be so pleased if she sometimes could come to see me," Eva began eagerly, adding with more hesitation, as she wondered how much she dared to suggest to this man who was reputed to hate his fellow-creatures, "I thought if you would spare Sylvia to come to me sometimes, I might be able to help her with little things which would be useful to her, things like music and drawing. She

and I made friends in the meadows, and I believe we should both like to be greater friends." It was simply said, and the speaker's eyes looked into John's face with a frank simplicity which pleased him as much as the gentle dignity of her manner.

In this girl with the restful eyes there was nothing to suggest subtlety, or any of those feminine artifices which he held in such contemptuous horror. Her glance, her words, her manner alike proclaimed in her a straight and upright nature, and when she added after a pause: "I think Sylvia and I could help each other in several ways," his smile seemed a prophecy of what his answer to his proposal would be. Sylvia's hand tightened over his in a clasp of excited delight, and the colour on her face deepened, her eyes shone like stars; her smile was almost pathetic in its rapturous delight.

"Oh, please, Mr. John, may I come? I do believe I could learn ever such a lot with her, and I would be as good as good."

John looked down at her, half ruefully, half smiling.

"I am a poor sort of fellow to bring up a little girl," he said. "I am doing my best—Mrs. Day and I are both doing our best, but—I don't say it is an ideal way of educating a ward; all the same, you're pretty happy with me, aren't you, Sylvia?"

"I'm just as happy as the day is long," she answered seriously, "and you're a lovely person to bring up little girls. We have beautiful times, you and I. Only—I would like sometimes to come

and see the princess." She chuckled a soft little chuckle. "She likes to have lots of friends, and so do I. I've always room for more, same as she has. I believe hearts just spread and grow the more you put into them."

Both her elders smiled at the child's words, and then Eva drew Sylvia on to the big couch beside her, and John sat down near them.

"It is very good of you to ask Sylvia," John said. "No doubt you know what all the world knows, that my house is not a very favoured spot. And"—his brow darkened—"I had made up my mind that Sylvia should have no teaching from any woman, barring my old housekeeper. I had a good reason for my decision," he added abruptly, "but as you are so very kind about it, I should like to make an exception in your favour, and"—he hesitated—"I don't want to prevent her from making friends—friends who won't hurt her," he added under his breath.

"I am glad you will let her come," Eva murmured, her heart full of pity for this man with the gloomy eyes and prematurely worn face. "I do not think she will learn anything you don't like here, and I do believe in people making friends."

"Sylvia has set her heart on coming to you, and I won't stand in her way; but as for making friends?"—he shrugged his shoulders and laughed—"I am not a believer in it myself. And promise me this"—he lowered his voice and almost glowered at Eva, whilst Sylvia moved across the room to where

Bari lay—"promise me that the child shall not know any woman but yourself. I will make no exceptions about that. I don't want her contaminated. I don't want her to get into any woman's hands, and be taught falseness." He spoke so fiercely that Eva looked startled, as well she might, and John, seeing the impression his words created, added more gently: "I didn't mean to upset you. I am afraid I spoke more strongly than I ought to have done, but I feel very strongly about this particular point."

"Do you think I might just go out on the lawn with Bari for a little run?" Sylvia asked, coming back to the sofa, and putting an appealing hand on Eva's arm. "He does look at the garden with such longing eyes. I believe he's pining to be out there. Could I go with him?"

"Yes, of course," Eva gave laughing consent, "I want you and Bari to be great friends. He is a very human puppy."

"I think we're great friends already," Sylvia answered earnestly; and for an instant she knelt down beside the huge dog who had crossed the room after her, and put her arms round his neck; "he's the sort of dog you can tell things to, isn't he? I had a dog like that in South Africa, and I told him lots of things, and he always understood. I believe Bari will, too."

"I believe he will." Eva smiled with the sympathy of a true dog lover. "Have a good run together all round the lawn, and then come back."

The child and the dog went out of the long French window into the garden, and she turned towards John again.

"Of course I will do exactly as you wish," she said; "if you do not wish Sylvia to know any woman, she shall meet no one here. She shall see nobody but me, and perhaps my brother. But I believe I can help her in lots of ways, and I am sure she and I will be very great friends. She is such a dear little soul."

"She is a dear little soul," John answered; "she has brought sunshine even into my very shadowed house. She has such a glad way of looking at everything. I never knew anybody who could make so much happiness for herself out of little things."

"What a great gift," Eva said thoughtfully, "to be able to make happiness for one's self out of little things. I wonder whether that is the secret of the best sort of happiness."

"I am not an expert in happiness of any sort," John said drily, "and I did not come here to-day to trouble you with views of happiness in the abstract. If you really will be good enough to help Sylvia with some of those things a woman ought to learn, I shall be most grateful to you. The child has taken a great fancy to you."

"And I to her," Eva answered promptly; "she is very lovable, with a lovableness one cannot exactly define. There is something so—'giving out' about her, if you know what I mean."

John smiled at the original expression.

"Yes, I understand," he said, "and I think you are right. Sylvia is always giving out. Judging from her character as she is now, she is likely to go on doing it all her life. She is perpetually giving herself, and her love, and her care to somebody or something. Whether it is to Mrs. Day or the Rector or me; or whether to one of her poor friends in the lane, or to some decrepit animal she brings in to me to be cured, she is eternally giving out."

"Then no wonder I call her lovable," Eva exclaimed; "she will always attract love because she is always loving: that big puppy of mine already adores her," she added, as through the window she caught a glimpse of Sylvia and Bari walking sedately across the lawn after their first boisterous scamper, the child's hand resting upon the dog's head, her small body pressed close against his big shaggy one.

"All animals seem to recognise a friend in Sylvia," John said, his glance following Eva's. "She brings me in the most weird collection of creatures: yesterday it was a toad that she declared was not very well; a few days ago the most melancholy specimen of cathood was brought in with a broken leg; another time it was a bird whose wing was injured; and last week—Sylvia shed many tears over it—the most terribly sick puppy who ended his life in our animals' hospital. I have set apart a room downstairs for the sick and maimed creatures the child unearths for me. Mrs. Day began to get a little restive about what she called 'the

nasty live things' Sylvia introduced into the establishment."

"She seems to have made great friends with some of the poor people too."

"She knows every soul in those cottages along the lane leading to the meadows. She comes to me with stories of Daddy this and Granny that, and Joe's cough, and somebody else's dreadful rheumatics; and she uses their own odd expressions for describing their afflictions. They seem to worship the very ground upon which those small feet of hers tread. And it is for herself they love her, not because of the beef tea and puddings she persuades Mrs. Day to let her take to them."

"You go to see them too?"

"Since Sylvia came, they have asked to see me. They constitute my only patients," was the grim response. "You are flying in the face of all Marshdale's views of propriety by having anything to do with me."

"I don't think I care very much about Marshdale's views of propriety," Eva answered lightly, rising as he rose to take his departure. "Noel—my brother—and I prefer to judge about people and things for ourselves; we do not care to be guided by the judgment of a little town like this."

Sylvia and the big dog came into the room at the moment, and having made final arrangements for her next visit to the Meadow House, John took his ward away, leaving behind him a girl whose heart was deeply stirred and puzzled.

"Poor man—oh! poor man," was her thought after the doctor and his ward had left her, "some woman must have been horrible to him, or he would never feel so dreadful about women as he does. And I believe the woman was Mrs. Danvers. The day her husband died here, when she lifted her head and looked at him, Dr. Camberley stared at her as if she was a ghost, and a ghost he had never expected to see again. And she told me how much she would like to take a house near here, so as to be within reach of him, as he was a very old friend. I wish I knew the truth about it all, and I should like to comfort him—oh! I should like to comfort him. Only I shall try never to see him even if he brings Sylvia again, because he must never think—never, never think that I am the sort of woman who would try to buy his friendship by being good to his ward!"

After that first visit John did not go back to the Meadow House, but Sylvia's visits became a regular institution, and under Eva's guidance she learnt much that neither her two men friends nor Mrs. Day could teach her. But John never again acted as her escort. He trusted Eva with the child, but he did not wish to see the girl for herself.

It was on one morning in September that Sylvia burst into Eva's little sitting-room with eyes alight, and a flushed, smiling face.

"Something beautiful has happened; something just lovely," she said: "Mr. John's got two patients, isn't it grand? And he says the world must be

coming to an end ; but of course he's ever so pleased inside him, though he doesn't say much outside. The Rector's got a bad cold and he sent for Mr. John last night ; and this morning Mr. John was sent for to go and see a friend of the Rector's who's stopping at the hotel. And I believe it all came out of our splendid secret, the Rector's and mine. It's our surprise for Mr. John, and it *did* surprise him. Only he doesn't know about its being us, because it's our secret still. Only isn't it beautiful ? It makes me happy right through me because I know he is glad ! "

CHAPTER XII

NO. 10, THE LANE

ALICIA HENDERSON lived at No. 10, The Lane, one of those tiny cottages which lay at the back of John Camberley's house in the lane that ran down towards the meadows. She was a grim old woman, well past middle life, and she looked with grim eyes and unsmiling face at the little girl who stood at her door one gusty October day. The wind that was sweeping the yellow leaves, and rustling and whirling them along the lane, blew Sylvia's dusky hair like a soft cloud across her face, and whipped the colour into her cheeks; and she laughed her gay little laugh as an extra boisterous blast twisted her skirts round her black-stockinged legs, and almost wrenched her hat from her head.

"Isn't it blowy?" she said, looking into Alicia's eyes with her friendly glance, that glance which always seemed to expect equal friendliness in return. "Please I've come to say there's going to be an awfully nice concert in the school to-night, and will you come?"

"Me go to a concert? Not likely!" The woman in the doorway laughed harshly. "I haven't time

to be playing about at concerts, whatever other people may do."

"The Rector says lots of the other people are coming," Sylvia said with unconscious literalness, "and I do wish you could come too. He said I was specially to ask the friends I wanted, and I thought of you."

"You wouldn't call me one of your special friends, I suppose, would you?" Alicia asked, a curious look in her eyes as they fixed themselves intently upon the child.

"Oh! yes, I should," Sylvia answered without a second of hesitation. "Why, we've talked a lot in the churchyard, and once you let me come inside your house—the time I brought you back your kitten." The grim lines of the woman's face relaxed a little, something which bore a distant relationship to a smile hovered over it.

"Well! there's no denying you've talked to me in the churchyard," she said, not very graciously. 'I don't know what to goodness makes me go and sit there, excepting that my leg won't let me get far, and I seem to fancy getting out now and then in the sunshine."

"And it's lovely and sunny in the churchyard, isn't it?" Sylvia exclaimed eagerly, "And old Daddy Johnson says that when February comes, all the grass is white with snowdrops. When I first came there were daffodils under the grey old wall—and violets, lots of violets."

"Oh! there's violets in the churchyard, plenty of 'em," Alicia said gruffly

"And roses," Sylvia's eager voice broke in; "don't you like the crimson ones all over the porch, and the bushes that smell so sweet?—the ones that are planted amongst the graves. I think the churchyard is a very lovely place." The grim woman looked down at the child's dreamy face, curiosity expressed on her own.

"You ain't got any gloomy thoughts about dead folks?" she questioned abruptly. "You ain't afraid of churchyards?"

"Afraid?" Sylvia looked genuinely puzzled; fear played no part in her sane and wholesome nature. "What would I be afraid about? And I shouldn't think one need have any gloomy thoughts about dead people. They're still alive really, you see—somewhere else, they're still alive really. Mr. Symonds says the churchyard just makes us remember that death is the gate to life, and I love it, it's so sunny, and so glad."

"You're the first person I ever heard call a churchyard glad," Alicia Henderson said with a repetition of her harsh laugh; "but there, you're a queer little piece altogether!"

"That's what Mrs. Day says. She says I'm a queer little piece, but I don't know what she means. I'm not queerer than other little girls, am I?" A little questioning frown puckered her forehead; she looked anxiously into the grim woman's small, rather closely set eyes.

"Don't you worry yourself about that." Again came the odd, unaccustomed smile which had

seemed so foreign to Alicia's face. "You've got ideas of your own, that's all—ideas you've learnt from the Rector, I daresay. And I'll be bound you don't half understand all he says to you."

"I don't understand it quite all," Sylvia said simply, "but I think I'll understand it when I get bigger. And my own Daddy gave me ideas too, and so does Mr. John." A sudden scowl wiped the transitory smile from Alicia's face. It would seem as though it had been brought there by the mention of John's name.

"Well! I can't stand chattering here," Alicia said almost roughly; "I've got things to see to indoors."

"I'm dreadfully sorry you can't come to the concert," Sylvia answered. "Mrs. Day's coming but Mr. John can't."

"He wouldn't be likely to," Miss Henderson responded with something like a sneer; "he doesn't care much for company, does he?"

"No—he doesn't." Sylvia shook her head sadly, and the wind rioting up the lane, again tossed her soft hair into fresh confusion. "I'm afraid he isn't very sociable. You see, he's got rather used to being alone, and so he doesn't care to go out much. But I'm going—for a great treat, because Mr. Symonds begged that I should, and I think it will be lovely. I haven't ever been to a concert before, you see," she ended, with a little gasp of joyful anticipation. "And, please, is the kitten all right?" she added, after a pause.

"The kitten's well enough," Alicia Henderson responded somewhat curtly; then—either because of a shadow of disappointment she saw in Sylvia's eyes, or because there flashed back into her mind the remembrance of the day some weeks back when the child had rescued the kitten from rough lads who were proposing to drown it—she said grudgingly: "You can come in and see it if you like."

Sylvia's eyes shone as she walked on tiptoe into the cottage, almost as if she were visiting some inviolable sanctuary, which indeed it was in Alicia Henderson's eyes. She was one of those sour women who glory in "keeping themselves to themselves," to use their own favourite phrase; a phrase which indeed represents to them a sacred shibboleth; and visitors never crossed her threshold, or entered that holy of holies, her best parlour. It was a stuffy little apartment; its window was evidently only opened on occasions so rare as to be almost entirely negligible, and such light as could filter through the small panes, was considerably obstructed by the geraniums which blocked up a very large part of the windowsill. The room was almost entirely full of furniture, and to move about it at all involved squeezing yourself with difficulty between tables, chairs, and a couch covered with a wonderful crochet coverlet. A bright red cloth was spread over the table, and upon this were a few large and ornately bound books arranged symmetrically about a vase, holding strangely coloured grasses. The mantelpiece was crowded with ornaments of a

most ordinary description, but nothing in the whole apartment suggested either home or comfort, and Sylvia looked round it with an involuntary sigh.

"You've got some lovely geraniums," she said, anxious to be as politely appreciative as truth would permit, "but I suppose you don't sit in here very much. It's all so—so tidy."

"I sit here on Sunday," her hostess said stiffly. "There's good books on that table, the *Pilgrim's Progress* and the Bible. I read them in here on Sundays. I was always one to read my Bible."

"Were you?" Sylvia asked with innocent interest. "Mr. John——"

"Well, you wanted to see the kitten, didn't you?" Alicia interrupted, with a sharpness which surprised her visitor. "I'll fetch her in to you."

"Oh! please may I just go and see her in the kitchen, if she is in the kitchen," Sylvia answered, her intimate acquaintance with other cottages in the lane giving her a good working knowledge of the architecture of this particular house. "The kitchen is just behind this room, isn't it?" Miss Henderson assented grumpily, and rather to her own surprise, she took the child along the passage, and into the little kitchen whose window looked across a tiny strip of garden to the sunny churchyard beyond.

"I believe I like a kitchen better than a best parlour," Sylvia said thoughtfully, her eyes roving round the room, which it was Alicia's pride to keep spotlessly clean; "it feels more friendly, doesn't it?"

"I don't know about friendly." The chief note in Alicia's voice was a grudging one. "I was never one to be friendly. I don't hold with making myself cheap. But I like a kitchen to live in. There's company in the fire, and the kettle."

"And the kitten," Sylvia exclaimed, pouncing upon a small black object curled round in a chair by the window; "a kitten is real company, isn't it?" Her hand caressed the head of the black furry creature, who purred loudly, and looked up at her with wide green eyes. "I love all beasts, chiefly Bari; he comes first. He and I are very particular friends; but I've got lots of room in my heart for this kitty, too. There's always room in one's love for somebody else, or something else, isn't there?" she asked, looking into Miss Henderson's sombre countenance with an interested question upon her own.

"I couldn't say," was her chilling response. "Love doesn't trouble me much, and I don't trouble love."

"Now isn't that a pity?" Sylvia said. "It makes you feel as happy as happy if you love people, and animals, and flowers; and there's such a lot to love in the world."

"Is there?" Alicia Henderson banged a plate down upon the table. "Well, that's as may be. I'm not one of those who holds with making yourself cheap to every Tom, Dick and Harry. I've kept myself respectable, and I always shall do so; and I've had no dealings with any but what's

respectable too. I know my duty and I do it. That's good enough for me." Miss Henderson's lips closed tightly, her small eyes looked at Sylvia with a glance which seemed to express finality; and her arguments were of a kind with which her small visitor was not able to cope.

"It's very kind of you to let me come in and see you," she said, "and I'm afraid I'm disturbing you when you want to get your tea ready"—she glanced at the plate just banged down upon the table—"but I did want to see the kitten." She gave the kitten in her arms a soft hug. "And I'm dreadfully sorry about the concert. So will the Rector be." Miss Henderson gave a little snort—no other word would describe the sound she emitted, but there was an oddly softened look in her eyes, as she watched Sylvia lay the black ball of fluff back upon the chair from which she had taken it.

"I'm not one for concerts," she said, with a shade less grimness, "and the Rector won't take any note of whether I'm there or not. He's got plenty to think about besides me. I don't expect anybody to trouble their heads about one lone single woman."

"I believe the Rector troubles his head about everybody in the parish," Sylvia answered, with a wise shake of her head, "and good-bye, Miss Henderson, and thank you for letting me see your nice house and your kitten." She held out her hand to her not very hospitable hostess, and for a moment Alicia hesitated. Then she took the small

hand into her own bony one, and shook it limply.

"Well, well," she said, "you won't take a denial, will you?"

"And some day perhaps we'll have another talk in the churchyard," Sylvia said, not understanding and therefore not replying to Miss Henderson's words, "and I'll bring Bari to see you there, as he's my bestest animal friend. He goes walks in the meadows with his mistress, and I'll bring him to see you when you sit on the bench near the wall where the violets are."

"Old fool that I am, my tongue seemed tied so that I couldn't say what I'd a mind to say, that I'm not one as cares for great rough dogs," Alicia muttered to herself, when, having shut the front door behind her visitor, she returned to the kitchen, and proceeded with the preparations for her tea. "I'm sure I don't want no nasty great dogs worrying round," she went on, still muttering to herself, whilst she took half a loaf and some butter from a cupboard, and poured hot water into the brown earthenware teapot, "and whatever that child comes bothering to see me for, *I* don't know. She doesn't get much of a welcome here." Alicia chucked a chuckle as grim as her face. "But there, she doesn't seem to notice whether you're uncivil to her or not. She seems to make sure you want her and her friendliness. Well!—*I* don't!" A sudden vicious energy rang in her voice. She lifted her head and looked down the strip of garden to

the churchyard, with a sort of challenge in her glance. "I don't want her friendliness, nor anybody else's—hers least of all." Her hard mouth shut with a snap like a steel trap. "I've no wish to have anything to do with Camberley's house, nor with anybody that comes out of it." There had been a gleam of softness in her eyes whilst Sylvia talked to her, but the gleam had gone now, her eyes were hard again, hard and steely, and she sat down to her tea with a certain determined set of her features, almost as if she were deliberately thrusting something out of her mind, and forcing herself to put it into the background of her thoughts.

She ate her meal with this same deliberation, and when she had finished, and washed up and put away her tea things, she did what was most unusual for her to do. She went slowly from the kitchen into the best parlour, round which Sylvia had looked an hour earlier. Alicia's gaze wandered round the room now, taking in all that made it to her infinitely precious and unique. The slippery leather chairs and couch which for practical use were the height of discomfort, meant to her gentility, the respectable, the little something which set you above your poorer neighbours. The well-bound books on the table, school prizes which had been won by her brothers in a remote past, also went to show not only the gentility, but the brains with which the Henderson family was endowed; and although, excepting the Bible and the *Pilgrim's Progress*, she herself never

opened any of those volumes, they had a real value in her eyes. They were genteel, even more genteel than the coloured grasses, the china ornaments, the bright cloth on the table, and the crochet cover on the sofa.

"I believe I like a kitchen better than a best parlour; it feels more friendly, doesn't it?" Sylvia's words came into the head of the woman who stood looking round the best parlour; Sylvia's eyes, grey and very clear, seemed to be looking into hers with their direct and fearless gaze. "It feels more friendly, doesn't it?"

The sound of the child's voice still echoed round the room, and Alicia Henderson's grim face relaxed into the semblance of a smile. Then it hardened again, and her thin lips set themselves tightly.

"Why couldn't she have been somebody else's ward?" she muttered. Much living alone had bred in her a habit of talking to herself. "John Camberley and I don't need to come across each other's path again." As she muttered the words she frowned. "And I'm not one to grow soft because a child comes talking pretty talk." Her frown became a scowl, the slight softening which had been apparent in her face vanished, there was something almost sinister in the hardening of her already hard mouth. But although she set herself so determinedly to forget Sylvia's visit, although to the best of her power she thrust the thought of the child into the very background of her mind, she was nevertheless haunted by the memory of Syl-

via's eyes and smile, by the sound of the small clear voice that had said so earnestly, " I believe I like the kitchen better than the best parlour. It feels more friendly, doesn't it ? "

CHAPTER XIII

REPARATION

ON a May afternoon eight years after the day on which Sylvia had first come to Marshdale, Henry Symonds sat at his writing table composing his Sunday sermon. Or, to put it more accurately, the Sunday sermon was the ostensible reason why he was seated at the big square table in the study, his open Bible beside him, and a clean sheet of foolscap paper spread out on the blotting-book. But the sheet remained clean and unsullied; not a single note had yet been written upon it; and the Rector sat back in his chair looking out of the open window with dreamy eyes, his lips parted in a smile. Outside in the Rectory garden, May was at its best, and the air that came drifting into the study carried with it the sweetness of lilac and laburnum flowers, and of the hawthorn hedge which stood, a white screen of blossom, between the garden and the meadows beyond. Through the hedge the Rector's eyes could catch the golden gleam of buttercups, and the silvery flash of the stream that rippled its way through the meadowland; and beyond the golden meadows, soft hills were visible

cutting across the blue of the sky. In the beds that bordered the lawn the peonies were in flower, crimson and pale pink; and there was a blazing glory of azaleas behind a phalanx of wallflowers velvety brown. Forget-me-nots opened starry blue eyes to the sunlight; and by leaning a little forward, the Rector could catch just a glimpse of the rock garden which was the special joy of his heart.

Aubretias, deep purple and lilac, flowed over it in a torrent of bloom; rock roses were unfolding orange and pink, white and yellow blossoms: veronica, pale blue and dark blue, and little Alpine pinks very starry and dainty were diversified by the pure whiteness of arabis, and the gold of alyssum.

The Rector was a keen gardener, his rockery was the most treasured corner of his garden: and Sylvia had long ago learnt to look upon the more rare rock plants as something especially precious, to be guarded with most particular care. Sylvia was often in the Rectory garden, just as she had been all through the years that had come and gone since she first came to the house in Draper Street; and the Rectory robins knew her as well as did the robins that hopped about John Camberley's garden, and fluted their clear little songs from the pear tree on the little lawn. Henry Symonds' thoughts were running a good deal upon Sylvia as he sat there ostensibly composing his Sunday sermon, and he smiled, as his drifting thoughts went back across the years to that first afternoon when he and Sylvia had talked together. He still had in his mind a

very vivid picture of her as she had looked on that long-ago afternoon—in her sombre garments, her childish face alight and eager, her eyes shining, whilst she told him about her guardian and the practice which alike had "gone to pieces!"

"Bless her heart!" the Rector exclaimed aloud, whilst his eyes followed the flight of a butterfly hovering over his bed of wallflowers, "bless her heart. She is as much of a child now as she was then, and yet——" His words and his thoughts seemed to break off simultaneously, the smile slowly faded from his face; he sighed, and pushing back his chair, walked through the long window into the garden and began slowly to pace the path beside the bed of glowing azaleas. "And yet—Sylvia is no longer a child." That was the quick darting reflection which had checked his line of thought.

Sylvia was no longer a child, she was growing up. The little girl was, technically speaking, a little girl no longer; already her skirts were lengthening, and she had turned up her hair. He smiled again as he thought of those dusky masses of her hair which had made such a charming background for the small eager face, and had blown about her like a cloud when she raced across the meadows with Bari. She raced across them still, in spite of her increasing years, he reflected, his smile deepening at the remembrance. But the smile went again very quickly, and he paused many times in his pacing of the garden walks, deep in thought, looking absently at the orange and gold of the azaleas. If the child

was stepping fast towards womanhood, was it not time that some change should be made in her upbringing and environment? Ought she not to know more of the world than could be learnt in her placid peaceful life at Marshdale? Was it fitting that things should be left just as they were when she was only a little child of ten? It was true that Camberley's position was to a certain degree less isolated than it had been eight years before. He could boast now of an occasional patient, and the man himself wore a less bitter and desolate air. But still—life in the house in Draper Street was scarcely the ideal one to be chosen for a girl of eighteen, even though her education there was supplemented by such help and teaching as were given to her by Eva Ormonde.

"I dislike interfering in other people's affairs," he reflected, pausing again in his walk to watch a bee droning over his forget-me-nots, "but in this case I believe it is my duty to say something. Camberley is probably oblivious of the pace at which the years have run away, and Sylvia does not know what is likely to be best for her own good." His face was still very thoughtful as he made his way slowly across the lawn, and, after a little détour to look at the jewelled loveliness of the rock garden, went in at his study window, at the precise moment when his parlourmaid entered the room at the other end.

"A young woman has called to ask you to go and see Miss Henderson, sir," she said. "The young

woman wished me to say that Miss Henderson is very ill indeed, and would you go as quickly as possible? "

"Of course, of course," the Rector answered, the dreaminess gone from his face, and an alert expression taking its place. "Tell the young woman I will come at once;" and as the maid left the room, he took a soft hat from a peg near the door, put a Prayer Book into his pocket, and glanced with a smile at the clean sheet of paper on which some of the notes for his sermon should already have been written.

"I have been wasting time in thinking of Sylvia and Camberley, instead of attending to my own business," he thought ruefully, "and now the sermon must be thought out later. But I am glad Miss Henderson has sent for me—very glad." A little smile played round his lips. "All these years she has refused to have anything to do with me or my ministrations. Now she has sent for me. I am glad."

To go out of the gate at the bottom of his own garden, was his nearest way to the lane in which Alicia Henderson's cottage stood, and Henry Symonds again walked past the bed where the azaleas flamed against their background of dark wallflowers, and turned down a side path between rows of tulips, crimson and rose-coloured and golden, and so through a shrubbery where laburnums dropped yellow blossoms at his feet, to the wicket gate leading into the churchyard. By the lych gate the great chest-

nut was in bloom, and in the meadows beyond, the cuckoo was calling, and the larks were singing their songs of summer. The sunny May world seemed to be alive and glad, and as the Rector passed along between the rows of graves, he murmured under his breath, "'Who holdeth our soul in life'—always in *life*," and instinctively he lifted his hat, and looked upwards into the clear sky. "In the midst of death we are in life"! The thought still lingered with him as he walked through the lych gate under the blossoming chestnut trees, and so along the lane to Alicia Henderson's house, where a tidy young woman opened the door.

"I'm sure I'm glad to see you, sir," she said; "I got the neighbour Mrs. Barnes to run up to the Rectory for me. I am Miss Henderson's niece, Mrs. Jacobs, and my aunt—she is worrying to see you, she can't seem to rest."

"Has Miss Henderson been ill long?" Mr. Symonds asked as he stepped into the trim little parlour, which had not seemed very friendly in Sylvia's eyes. The room wore exactly the aspect it had worn when Sylvia preferred the more friendly and homely look of the kitchen; and its close smell made the Rector long to fling open the window, and let in some of the fresh sweetness of the outside air He had never before been admitted into this apartment, or invited into any room in Alicia Henderson's house. She had persistently held him at arm's length, and had frigidly refused to allow him to visit her, or to treat her in any way as one of his

parishioners, declining to take part in any parochial entertainments—as she proudly put it, "keeping herself to herself."

"She was took bad last week," her niece said in response to Mr. Symonds' question, "and she've been getting worse every day since I came. They sent for me—her neighbours sent. I live over to Upperton, and it wasn't very easy for me to get away, having my husband and two children. But there! she's my mother's sister, Aunt Alicia is, and I'm the only one of her kin left, as you might say."

"And she sent for me?" the Rector said, when she paused to take breath, and so for a moment stemmed the garrulous torrent; "she wishes to see me?"

"She's been worrying and worrying the last hour lest you shouldn't come in time," Mrs. Jacobs burst out eagerly, as though the torrent of words, momentarily stemmed, must burst out again with increased velocity. "She never said a word about wanting you nor anybody, not till an hour ago, and then she was as bad as anybody could be, I should say—and Mrs. Barnes she thinks the same—that she's going fast. And I'm sure I'm thankful you've come. It fair turned me to hear Aunt Alicia moaning, and saying you would never come in time."

"Take me up to her at once," the Rector broke in with unusual sternness; "if she is so ill as that, take me up at once." And awed into silence by his gravity, Mrs. Jacobs preceded him up the narrow stairs, where the gaudy carpet added its smell to

the general stuffiness of the house. A door on the right-hand side of the staircase stood open, and Mrs. Jacobs moved aside to allow the visitor to pass into the room beyond. But when she showed an evident intention of following him, he shook his head, and waved her towards the opposite room.

"Wait there," he said quietly; "if I want you, I will call you. But I must see Mrs. Henderson alone. She may not care to speak before a third person;" and gently shutting the door in the face of the discomfited Mrs. Jacobs, he crossed the room to the bedside. It was obvious enough that the gaunt woman, who sat nearly bolt upright, propped by pillows, was drawing very near to death, and her difficult breathing seemed to fill the little room with sound. She raised her hand weakly as Henry Symonds bent over her, and for several seconds she tried in vain to speak. Then with a supreme effort of will she rallied her fast failing forces, and her hand touched the Rector's hand.

"I couldn't die peacefully without telling the truth." Her voice was very faint, but there was no sign of weakness on her face. Grim determination was still its chief characteristic, and the hard eyes showed the same grimness of determination as did the firm lines of mouth and chin.

"It was before you came it happened," she went on, and though she spoke in gasps there was no lack of firmness in her words. "My father, David Henderson, died suddenly, and they said he shouldn't have died. The doctor was blamed, Dr. John

Camberley; he swore he'd sent the medicine. I swore he hadn't. Nobody thought much of him just then—he was living the life of an evil liver, a prodigal—they took my word against his. But he spoke the truth. I swore falsely."

"And all these years you have left the lie uncorrected?" In the old man's usually gentle voice there was a stern note.

"I was a respectable woman—and a respected woman." Her hard eyes still met his unflinchingly. "I didn't want people to judge me. But"—her eyes suddenly wavered—"I can't die with a lie on my soul, and it was a lie. John Camberley sent the medicine right enough. I forgot to give it until too late—that's what it was, I forgot to give it, and father died. Then I buried the bottle in the garden. I could not face the sneers of the town. I'd always been respectable. People thought well of me. I tell you I couldn't let them think different. And after I'd once told the lie, I couldn't draw back and say something else. Nobody would ever have respected me again." Her eyes turned from the Rector's face and wandered restlessly round the room, whilst her fingers picked at the bedclothes. "But now—now I must tell you the truth, just you. I had to get it off my mind. I can't die with a lie on my soul; I want to die peacefully. And I keep on thinking of the child."

"What child do you mean?"

"The little girl John Camberley looks after. She's talked to me times without number in the

churchyard, when nobody else cared to talk to a dull old woman. She's been here to see me, when nobody else would have wanted to come. I keep on thinking about her. I can't get her out of my thoughts. There was something in her that made you think of love, and sunshine, and goodness. And it's the same now she's grown up. Every time I tell myself I need not tell the truth, I seem to see her face, and I know I can't die with a lie on my soul."

"Then you will make full reparation now?"

"Full reparation?" Her eyes grew uneasy. "I'm telling you the truth, and that's enough. I'm telling you, and there's no need for it to go further."

"There is every need for it to go further." Symonds tried to master the indignation he felt, and to speak quietly. "Dr. Camberley is not to be allowed to remain under a false accusation. The great wrong done to him during all these years must be set right."

"Set right?" Her voice, which had gained a certain fictitious strength, began to fail again, her breathing quickened.

"You will sign a paper now, in my presence, telling the whole truth," the Rector said firmly. "I will draw it up at once, and you will sign it, and it is a tardy enough reparation to a man who for so long has suffered unjustly. It is the least, the very least, you can do."

"I can't do that," Alicia Henderson moaned, "I can't do what will make people point a finger

at me all their days. I have told you the truth. Let me die in peace."

The Rector's face looked strangely stern, but his voice was gentle.

"You could not die in peace if you left such a great wrong unrighted," he said. "Telling the truth to me is not enough. The wrong against Dr. Camberley must be undone. It is not"—he paused and spoke more slowly and even more gently—"it is not your respectability, or what people think of you, that matters now. All that matters is what God thinks of you, and whether there is anything for your fellow-creatures that you have left undone."

Miss Henderson's fingers still moved restlessly over the sheet, but the stubborn lines of her face relaxed a little, her eyes looked into Henry Symonds' face with a glance of desperate appeal.

"You are asking me to do the hardest thing I ever did," she panted out; "and if I do it, all the world will know."

"All the world must know," came the gentle but inflexible reply. "You cannot let John Camberley go on suffering for a wrong he never did. You cannot go to God with that sin upon your soul."

There was silence in the little stuffy room, a silence only broken by the difficult breathing of the dying woman, and the tick-tick of a small clock upon the mantelpiece. How many seconds ticked by whilst he stood quietly watching the changing expressions that crept over Miss Henderson's face, the Rector never knew, but suddenly—she lifted

her hand, and it seemed to him that when at last she spoke, it was only an overmastering effort of will that made her able to utter the words.

" Bring me paper and a pen," she said ; " I will sign what you tell me to sign. I will tell the truth. I cannot face God without signing the paper. I will do what you say."

CHAPTER XIV

"LET ME STAY HERE!"

"THE fact of the matter is, Noel, my dear, you shirk telling Eva."

"I am afraid that is about the truth," Noel admitted with a rueful laugh. "You see, Brenda, she has kept house for me for years—eight years since you married, and the time before your marriage as well. I feel a beast to think of springing a wife on her now."

The brother and sister were sitting in the Colsons' flat in town, or rather Brenda was sitting in a big armchair looking up at her brother who stood with his back to the mantelpiece, his hands idly twisting a spill, a certain expression of perplexity upon his face. Eight years of married life had made curiously little alteration in Noel's younger sister. She was still much the same pretty, light-hearted creature who had left her brother's house to marry Jack Colson; but underneath all the apparent light-heartedness there was a good store of grit and strength of character, and the eyes which looked mischievously up at the tall man by the mantelpiece, held tenderness as well as amusement.

"There is no reason why you should feel a beast," she said, in answer to Noel's words. "After all, Eva and I were very lucky to have a brother to share our home for so long; and Eva will be just as glad as I am, to think you are going to have your own individual happiness now. And it is happiness, isn't it?" she added gently, leaning a little forward and touching her brother's arm.

"It is happiness," he repeated after her, a smile lighting up his face; "it has been worth waiting for."

"Do you know, I think you and Beatrice Crosbie are simply splendid people," Brenda said earnestly, her face grown suddenly grave, "you deserve every single scrap of joy you get. You have lived up to your ideals in such a fine way."

Noel laughed a short embarrassed laugh. Like the generality of his sex he disliked anything that verged on the emotional, and at all times he deprecated any praise of himself.

"Oh! that's all right," he said quickly; "after all, there's no great merit in following a certain line of action, when there was absolutely no other line one could take."

"No other line?" Brenda's eyebrows went up, she spread out her hands comprehensively. "If you had not been you, and if Beatrice had not been what she is, do you suppose you would both have kept so loyally to friendship for all these years? I don't know whether or not it is very wicked of me, but I can't help being glad that horrible Major

Crosbie has died at last, and that Beatrice is free."

"Yes, Beatrice is free." There was a deep note of joy in Noel's words. "I don't want to think about poor Crosbie—he——"

"*Poor* Crosbie," Brenda interrupted; "it is all very well for you to call him that, because you are kind-hearted and feel just now that you must be charitable to all the world—including him. Of course I know we are supposed not to speak against the dead; but what on earth is the use of pretending that Major Crosbie was anything but a drunken reprobate, and that his wife lived a miserable life?"

"Sometimes it is better even to leave the truth unspoken," Noel said quietly.

"She lived her life most gallantly," Brenda continued, ignoring her brother's words; "I admire Beatrice Crosbie from the bottom of my heart. Women who live the sort of lives she has had to endure, ought to be given the V.C. or the D.S.O. But however gallantly she has borne it, only one word expresses what her life has been, and that word is Hell—with a big H."

Noel's face darkened.

"That's true enough, and it doesn't bear thinking about, much less discussing; it is all over now. And if I can, I mean to make up to her for what she has gone through."

"I fancy you can do it all right." The mischief flashed back into Brenda's eyes. "You will give her the first real, and royally happy time she has ever known. And meanwhile the news has to be

broken to Eva?" Noel nodded. "I don't imagine it will come to her with a tremendous shock of surprise," Brenda said. "She has met Beatrice here more than once; she knows you and Beatrice are great friends; she will understand the whole position. But—do you mean to take Beatrice to Marshdale? Is the Meadow House to be her home?"

"We have not talked out our future plans, everything is still so new." Noel's smile gladdened his sister's heart. "But my own idea is that Beatrice would prefer to stay in town. Her friends are here, her boy is to start work very soon in a relation's business in the city. I fancy London will be indicated for us. But what will Eva do?"

"Let her decide for herself," was the sage decision. "Talk it all over with her. Eva is a very understanding dear, and she will be so glad about your happiness. Let her just decide what she would like best for herself, and I believe she will decide to stay where she is. Her beloved Sylvia makes her cling to Marshdale; Sylvia fills a great deal of her life."

"Judging from the little I have seen of her, Sylvia is developing into a very charming girl," Noel answered. "I catch glimpses of her every now and again—we meet in the drive, or in the hall just as she is leaving Eva, and I confess I don't wonder Eva is so fond of her. All the same, when I marry, Eva's life is bound to be a lonely one. I wish there were any likelihood that she herself would marry."

"Sometimes I think Eva will never marry," Brenda said thoughtfully. "When she stays here, there are plenty of Jack's friends who would like to know her better, who—in the old-fashioned phrase—might even be said to pay attention to her. But it all goes off Eva like water off a duck's back; it simply makes no impression upon her whatever. She is just gracious and sweet to everybody, but to everybody alike. No one man could possibly imagine he was singled out more than any other man. Eva gives me an odd feeling of being in some way holding herself aloof from men, as if she deliberately set aside all idea of anything more than merely friendly acquaintanceship." Brenda puckered up her pretty brows as though she were trying to solve some problem, and Noel laughed.

"Probably the right person has not yet crossed her path," he said. "After all, Eva is not tottering on the verge of old age! She is only thirty-three, and in these days at thirty-three a woman is not tucked away on a shelf as one of the derelicts."

"Not like the heroine of Miss Yonge's book *The Clever Woman of the Family*, who at twenty-eight seemed to be looked upon as a confirmed and forever-and-ever-amen sort of old maid!"

"*Nous avons changés tout cela*," Noel responded lightly. "Well, look here, my dear, I wanted to talk over my own affairs with you before I see Eva. You know Beatrice well—she has only seen Eva now and again. I have been detained in town ever since Beatrice and I were formally engaged, but I

shall be going home to-morrow, and then I must talk things over with Eva."

"And Eva will be as sympathetic an old darling as she always is," Brenda answered with enthusiasm. "She has a marvellous way of putting herself into other people's places, and seeing with their eyes. She will be just as glad about your happiness as I am, though naturally she will miss you. But what a perfect dear of a sister-in-law Beatrice will be," she ended irrelevantly.

Those words recurred to her brother, when, an hour later, he entered Mrs. Crosbie's drawing-room; and the woman whose close friend he had been for so many years, came forward to greet him. "What a perfect dear of a sister-in-law Beatrice will be." Yes, his heart echoed Brenda's statement. Beatrice would be as ideal a sister-in-law, as she had been an ideal friend, as she would be an ideal wife. And with that thought in his mind he lifted her hand to his lips before he stooped and kissed her face.

"Oh! Noel, what a dear knight errant of a lover you are!" she exclaimed, as he drew her down beside him on the sofa. "I wonder whether you realise how much I appreciate your chivalry and self-restraint?" Noel's grey eyes met her dark ones in a glance of full understanding. The years during which he had been Beatrice's loyal and quiet friend had taught him many truths about the woman whose married life had been as Brenda graphically put it—a hell. For all those years of faithful and undemonstrative friendship, no word of

slander or gossip had touched Beatrice's good name: no finger had been pointed at her: neither she nor the man who was her friend had ever lowered their high ideals, or stooped to take one fraction more than was allowed them by straightforward friendship. And now they could look into each other's eyes with serenity of heart and clearness of conscience, able to reap their exceeding great reward.

"Brenda is overflowing with delight at having you for a sister-in-law," Noel said, his eyes fixed on the pure profile of her face, "and I know that Eva will echo Brenda."

"Eva feels much more of an unknown quantity." Mrs. Crosbie turned and looked at Noel, and there was a shadow of uneasiness in her eyes. "We have met so seldom. I feel—a little bit as though we were taking her too much by surprise, taking her at a disadvantage. She will be very lonely without you, my dear."

"I am afraid that is inevitable." Noel's tones were regretful. "But as Brenda and I were both saying just now, she has that very delightful child, Sylvia Brentwood, as an interest, and I cannot help hoping she herself may marry."

"I thought the child had a guardian," Beatrice said thoughtfully. "Would it be out of the range of possibilities that Eva and the guardian should like each other, and agree to undertake joint control of the delightful Sylvia?"

"At one time there were a good many queer rumours about Camberley—Sylvia's guardian"—

Noel spoke with a little hesitation—"and as far as I know, Eva never sees him. He is by way of avoiding his fellow-creatures, and has few, if any, friends. I believe the old Rector is the only person who is friendly to him."

"But surely there cannot be anything very much amiss with the poor man if the Rector is friendly?" Beatrice opened her dark eyes wide.

"Oh! well, I don't know. Rectors are supposed to be good to saints and sinners alike. And, frankly, I should not have been so willing to agree to Eva's scheme for helping Sylvia, if it had not been quite obvious that Dr. Camberley himself would not be a visitor at the Meadow House. I dislike local gossip intensely, but I am bound to say the man bore the character of rather a grey sheep. Apparently he has done more work during the last few years, thanks I shrewdly guess to the Rector's help; but he is still looked at askance. I should not like to suppose that Eva and he were in any way special friends."

"Eva must come often to us." Beatrice's voice was very soft over that last word. "She is such a dear, and certainly somebody will find out how charming she is. When you take me down to Marshdale to be introduced to her in my new capacity, she and I will make plans; and I want to see the child, too—the Sylvia who seems to make such a big part of Eva's life."

"Scarcely a child any more," Noel laughed; "when I last saw her some months ago, she was

promoted to long skirts. She must be nearly grown up by now.

"Grown up? Oh! Noel, I have been picturing an adorable little girl, and you smother all my romantic ideas with long skirts. She can't be really *grown up.*"

"I don't know her exact age, but I think she is very decidedly verging on that time when, as the poet says——"

"No, Noel," Beatrice interrupted with a laugh, "I will not let you quote the reluctant feet, brook and river verse! And in any case, the little Sylvia's age is quite unimportant. What matters is that she should be a help and comfort to Eva, when you are leaving her lonely. I take a great deal of interest in anybody brought up in such an unusual way as this child has been brought up."

"Chiefly a man's product," Noel assented; "a guardian of rather shady reputation, and an old Rector are mainly responsible for her education—with such touches as Eva has been able to add. I wonder what her future will be—though at this moment it is our own future with which I am chiefly concerned," he added, his hand drawing her nearer. "Since seeing Brenda I have heard of a house, which, if you feel like staying in town after our marriage, ought to suit us down to the ground."

"If it suits you, I think I ought to stay in town." Beatrice's soft eyes met Noel's in the full certainty that he would understand her position. "Tom is too young to be left to look after himself entirely.

You see, a mother of an eighteen-year-old boy is not like an irresponsible girl"—she folded her left hand over his, that held her right hand closely—" you are marrying somebody quite elderly."

" Quite elderly," he said with tender mockery, his glance resting on the clear whiteness of her complexion, and the dark softness of her eyes. " You wear your thirty-eight years very lightly, my dear; and what, when all's said and done, is thirty-eight? Certainly not elderly. You will be wanting next to wear caps to hide that glorious hair."

" Noel dear! Glorious hair! *You* wear crimson spectacles. Their colour is far too deep to be called rose colour. My rusty locks have never heard themselves called glorious in the whole course of a long and arduous career."

" *Rusty!*" It was Noel's turn to exclaim, and he exclaimed it with indignation. " Your dark hair with the red lights in it is unique enough to be called by any charming name; and your eyes——" Beatrice put her hand lightly over the speaker's lips and laughed again, a laugh so gay, so spontaneous that it did Noel's heart good to hear her. During all the years he had been her friend he had never before heard her laugh with that youthful gaiety.

" You have wandered far away from the subject," she said. " We are not discussing my points, but a house to live in. Tell me about the house you have heard about and leave off dissecting my beauties in detail." Once more her gay little laugh filled Noel's heart with gladness.

"As I walked across the Park," he said, "I happened to meet Mrs. Danvers. You know who I mean? The woman whose husband died so tragically in our house some years ago?" Beatrice nodded. "She stopped and spoke to me, and incidentally mentioned that she is anxious to get the end of a lease off her hands. She says she is tired of London, wants to travel, does not care to be saddled with a house and the bother of housekeeping. If you like the house and it is likely to suit us, it could be got without difficulty. It is in Kensington."

"I believe I have met that Mrs. Danvers," Beatrice said reminiscently, "a tall, very good-looking woman. I did not altogether take to her."

"She is not quite your sort, but I don't fancy there is any harm in her." Noel spoke with the kindly tolerance which marks so many of his sex. "It was a pretty bad shock for her losing her husband as she did; and she has no children. She must lead a lonely life, and one understands that she may not care to keep on a house and may prefer to travel. It is a little surprising that she has not married again. She must be a well-to-do woman, as well as a good-looking one."

Beatrice forbore to say that, if rumour spoke truly, the fact that Mrs. Danvers remained a widow was due to no lack of effort on her own part to alter this condition; but Beatrice was a very kindly woman, and at this moment her own overflowing happiness made her shrink more than usual from any words that sounded like backbiting.

"Mrs. Danvers may still marry again," she said; "she cannot be much older, if she is at all older, than I am. And you see I am not too old to have found favour in the eyes of my lord;" and she looked at him with a little mischievous glance.

"*You!*" he exclaimed impetuously. "You and Mrs. Danvers are not to be mentioned in the same breath. I don't say there is any harm in her"—he had gone back to his attitude of tolerance—"but you and she belong to different types of women. You don't live in the same street."

"That need not prevent our taking her house if you think it is likely to do," Beatrice put in smilingly. "Can we see it at any special time?"

"Mrs. Danvers said she would be at home to-morrow afternoon if you and I, or you alone, cared to go over the house. Shall we go together? I can manage to meet you there at five."

The clock was striking that hour from a neighbouring church on the following afternoon when Noel and his fiancée met on the doorstep of 124, Raynsley Gardens, and Beatrice greeted her lover eagerly.

"I like the position," she said; "and if the inside of the house is as nice as the outside, I shall find it very easy to make up my mind what to do about it."

In the drawing-room they were received by Nina Danvers, exquisitely gowned, exquisitely coiffured, almost exuberant in her welcome,

" Where is the real woman ? " the thought flashed through Beatrice's mind, " and what is she like ? " And the thought remained with her, whilst Mrs. Danvers talked on in a flowing stream of conversation, about the house, its capabilities, and her own movements.

" I feel as if I must get away into an entirely new atmosphere," she said to Beatrice, and her smile was an artificial one, a smile in which her hard eyes seemed to play no part. " This house is so full of memories, I want to go right away from them all, from everything that reminds me of my happy married life."

In Noel the words roused sympathy, to Beatrice they did not ring true. " And after all it is eight years since her husband died," came another of those flashing thoughts.

" I can assure you this has been a very happy house," Mrs. Danvers' voice ran on ; " I should like to think two happy people are coming into it ; " and her glance turned from Beatrice to Noel, with again a smile whose brilliancy did not detract from its hardness.

" And you are going to travel ? " Beatrice said courteously.

" That is my present idea. I believe I shall feel less desperately lonely in hotels than I do here. My life has been such a very lonely one since my dear husband died."

Once more it was Noel who felt a twinge of sympathetic pity—Beatrice who found herself doubting

the speaker's sincerity, as she answered in her quiet, pleasant voice—

"I should think perhaps travelling for a time, and hotel life, would be more congenial to you than being here; and I have every hope that the house will be what we shall want."

"You are giving up your house at Marshdale?" Mrs. Danvers turned to Noel, and Beatrice noticed a quickened interest in her manner. "I shall never forget how good you and your sisters were to me in all that dreadful time."

"Nothing is settled yet about the Meadow House; my sister will very likely stay on," Noel said. "She has friends and interests in Marshdale, and she is happy in her life there."

"I wonder"—Mrs. Danvers spoke with a certain hesitation which Beatrice observed—"I wonder whether Dr. John Camberley is still in the place? Years ago I knew him, but I am afraid he has not done as well as was hoped." The tone of non-committal interest in an old acquaintance struck Beatrice as lacking in sincerity, and the curiously eager look in Mrs. Danvers' hard eyes belied the indifference of her accents.

"I know Dr. Camberley so very slightly that I can hardly be said to know him at all," Noel answered. "In Marshdale at one time I believe he had not very much work, though I understand that his practice has improved lately. But I give you only hearsay: I really know nothing about Dr. Camberley's concerns."

"Surely"—Mrs. Danvers puckered her forehead, as though with an effort of memory—"surely he adopted a child, or had a child as a legacy—or something odd of that kind? I seem to remember a child in connection with him."

"She knows a good deal more about it than she pretends," Beatrice thought, "and she would like to get into touch with Dr. Camberley again if only she could find out how to do it." And as the thought went through her visitor's brain, Mrs. Danvers was listening attentively to Noel whilst he told her Sylvia's story, as it had been told to him by his sister.

"It was a great tax for a young man," he wound up by saying; "to have a child suddenly thrust upon him was really a pretty severe tax; one could have forgiven Dr. Camberley if he had refused to accept the charge. But he shouldered it manfully, and from what my sister tells me the little girl is a most charming personality."

"A little girl no longer, I should imagine," Mrs. Danvers said, with a suavity which somehow seemed to hide a sneer. "She must be nearly grown up now. It will complicate matters, won't it?" She looked at Noel with an apparently innocent smile. "Dr. Camberley is surely rather a young man to have the charge of a grown-up girl. She cannot be a child any longer."

CHAPTER XV

"SHE IS GROWN UP"

THE same thought which Nina Danvers had expressed when Noel and his fiancée called upon her, was in Henry Symonds' mind at almost identically the same time, though the circumstances were very different. By dint of persuasion and grave words of appeal and warning, he had induced Alicia Henderson to sign the paper which exonerated John Camberley from all blame for old David Henderson's death, and armed with that paper he made his way straight from Alicia's cottage to Camberley's house in Draper Street. For many years now he had been a welcome visitor there—still the only visitor, because Marshdale refused to accept John socially, even though he had a few patients scattered about the town; and Mrs. Day greeted him with a smile as an old friend.

"The doctor will be down in a minute, sir," she said; "he's only just got in from a long drive out to Pensworthy. You'll stay and take tea with him and Miss Sylvia, won't you, sir?" she added, with the freedom of an old and valued servant.

"Now, Mrs. Day, you are tempting me," the

Rector answered with a laugh. "I ought to go straight home and write my sermon, and you beguile me with your cakes, which are the best in the town. You know I am incapable of refusing your cakes."

With a gratified smile Mrs. Day departed, leaving the Rector alone in the room which had been so unspeakably cheerless a place when Sylvia first came into it eight years before. There was no trace of cheerlessness about it now! Long, long ago the drab paper on the walls had been replaced by one of a pale soft green, restful to the eye, and exactly the right colour for John's pictures—chiefly good prints in black frames. The floor was covered with a dark green carpet; there were cushions on the sofa and armchair upholstered in a delicate shade of green, and the mantelpiece no longer showed a huddled confusion of pipes and miscellaneous articles. There were flowers upon it; and flowers, too, upon John's writing-table. The whole room showed evidences of the loving hands that had been busy there, and the garden across which the Rector looked as he stood waiting for John, bore equal testimony to love and care. Eight years ago that garden had been little better than a desert, a neglected place of overgrown grass and weeds. But now all the desolation and neglect had vanished!

John Camberley's garden was one which rejoiced the heart of Henry Symonds, who was a true garden lover. The lawn, not rank and coarse any more, looked like green velvet—the beds shone like many-coloured jewels in the sunshine of May: upon the

wall at the farthest end a wistaria flung out a torrent of bloom; and a white clematis opened starry eyes upon the background of red brick. There was an apple tree in blossom—the delicate loveliness of its flowers showing against the blueness of the sky. There were lupins in the beds, and tulips, and here and there a great red poppy flaunted gaily, and the air that came in at the open window was sweet with the sweetness of wallflowers. John's room wore a look of being cared for and kept bright and homely—and John's garden wore the same look. The desolation seemed to have left them both for ever.

And John himself? When he came into the room, the Rector turned from the window and glanced at him almost anxiously. It suddenly seemed to the older man that he longed to find in the younger the same changes, the same wonderful difference that he found in the room and the garden. Henry Symonds had learnt to love the doctor during the years in which John had slowly, very slowly allowed their friendship to ripen; and he spoke quickly before Camberley could utter a word.

"My dear boy," he said, and there was a great tenderness in the words, "I have brought you something which will, I hope, set you right with your fellow-citizens—set you more right, I should say, for they are already beginning to learn that John Camberley is a first-rate doctor."

John laughed, and though there was still a little bitterness in the laugh, it was much more spon-

taneous than of old; a new courage, a new hopefulness seemed to have come into his face.

"They are beginning to accept me with great care and caution, simply because you and your friends gave me a leg up," he said; "but they will never believe I didn't kill old Henderson by neglect. That is going to stand in my way all my life. I shall never be able to make people think differently. They will never believe the truth about it."

"I fancy you will be able to make them believe it quite completely," Symonds answered with a smile. "This document ought to do all that is wanted;" and he handed to the doctor the paper he had brought from Alicia Henderson. "This is going to be so widely circulated that no one can fail to know the truth. And this ought to put the finishing touch to what you began yourself when you took up your work again, and patients began to come back."

John read the paper through and looked at the Rector with an odd smile.

"So! I am to be righted," he said; "I have always wondered what did happen about that medicine. I felt Alicia Henderson was not playing the game, though I could not think how. Well! I can't pretend I'm not glad that my name will not go down to posterity as an utter rotter. But this woman's deceit has cost me dear!"

"Very dear. But from now onwards there is nothing to hinder you from 'making good.' And as

I say, this confession is the finishing touch to all that you began with your newly begun work."

"This is the finishing touch to what Sylvia began, you mean," John answered almost roughly. "I can't take much credit to myself for anything. Without Sylvia I should have stayed with the dogs, and died with them too, long ago. I had gone to pieces more utterly than any one realised, when she came and picked up the pieces." He smiled whimsically. "But this"—his hand that held the paper shook, he was more moved than he cared to show—"this will make people see I was not the unutterable slacker they thought me. But though I did not neglect my patients, as Alicia Henderson's lie would have led the world to believe, still I was a poor sort of prodigal—when Sylvia came!"

"It is partly to Sylvia's influence that we owe this paper. She seems to have had a softening effect on Miss Henderson. All of us owe more than we realise to the child. Wherever she goes she carries love and sunshine—sunshine and love. I never knew anybody quite like her. And, my dear boy, that brings me to the second object of my visit." Symonds put a hand on John's shoulder. "Do you realise that the child has grown up? I have been thinking so much about her to-day. Do you know our little Sylvia is a woman? She is not a child any more; she is on the verge of womanhood, and we must face the fact!"

"Sylvia—a woman?" John laughed. "Why, it seems only yesterday that she first came into that

door, just a child, a little slim thing in black, with her grey eyes so big and wistful. Sylvia—a woman? It isn't possible."

"Look at her now." The Rector spoke slowly, pointing towards the garden, where at that moment Sylvia came into sight, walking slowly along the terrace. She was still very slight, but her hair no longer fell round her in dusky masses, it was coiled about her shapely head, and her girlish grace was emphasised, not hidden by the white folds of her gown. In her hand she swung a great bunch of rose-coloured tulips, and as she came down the garden path she sang a gay little song, smiling as she sang. For several seconds the two men watched her in silence, then John said slowly—

"I knew she was getting bigger, but I did not realise until now that she is—what she is. There is nobody like Sylvia!" A little gleam shot into his eyes, and the Rector saw that gleam.

"Sylvia is very unique, I am ready to own that," Symonds said with a smile; but he sighed as he smiled, remembering with a sudden flash of memory the face of another woman. Eva Ormonde's face rose before his mental vision—Eva Ormonde's face, fair and very sweet, with eyes of restful serenity. And because Henry Symonds had rare gifts of sympathy and intuition, he had learnt to understand Eva's secret, which she had imagined was hidden securely in her own heart. And recalling Eva's face, and the secret he had unwittingly discovered, the Rector sighed when he saw the sudden gleam in

John's eyes as they rested on Sylvia. John himself was entirely unaware of the feeling his eyes disclosed; unaware indeed that the feeling itself existed; conscious at the moment of one thought and of one thought only, that Sylvia was no longer a child, but a woman—lovely and gracious and altogether desirable. "But, Camberley," the Rector went on, "the very fact that Sylvia is so unique makes one realise that she ought to know more of the world—more of life than she is learning here. We have no business to lock her away from all knowledge."

"More of the world—what do you mean?" There was a harsh ring in John's voice; he looked at Mr. Symonds with a certain hostility in his eyes.

"She has lived such a sheltered existence," Symonds said gently, whilst the sound of Sylvia's voice drifted into the room as she passed from the garden and went singing up the stairs. "Excepting Miss Ormonde and me—and the poor folks, she knows so few people—almost none."

"I did not want her turned into a subtle, scheming woman," John answered slowly; "it was a woman of that sort who wrecked my life. I wanted Sylvia to be different. I have kept her apart; I have shielded and sheltered her so that she should be different."

"She is different; nothing and nobody could turn her beautiful nature into what you describe. My dear boy, it is not fair to keep her here"—the older man spoke gently—"she ought to see a bigger

world than Marshdale; she ought to meet and learn to know other men and women; we cannot always keep her to ourselves. Some day she will marry, and before she marries, she ought to see something of life and of a larger world than the tiny circle she knows here."

"Sylvia marry?" John looked blankly at his visitor. "But I couldn't be without her now. She and I—why—do you know how much she means to me?" The younger man's voice was fierce; it shook with an emotion which perhaps he himself did not wholly understand. But the old man's wisdom understood.

"I know," he said gently, "I know. But we must think of Sylvia first. We must do what is best for her. Do you care for her enough to do the right thing by her? That is the question. Will you do what is right for her, or only what pleases you most?"

"Care for her enough?" John laughed harshly. "I want to shelter her from everything that could ever hurt or vex her. Care for her enough? I would do any mortal thing to make her happy." And again he laughed.

"Camberley, my dear fellow, please understand I don't want to make things hard for you, and I understand the whole position very clearly. But when you think it over quietly, you will see that I am right, that the only fair thing you can do now is to let Sylvia go away from here to see the world, to learn to know other people—other men." The last

word was spoken with hesitation. "Leave her free to choose her own life. We cannot bind her here for ever: and for a time she ought to go away from Marshdale; she ought to take a plunge into something bigger than a sheltered pool. To mix metaphors, she ought to try her wings."

CHAPTER XVI

"YOU MUST GO AND SEE LIFE"

"I BELIEVE you have been concocting some evil plot. I didn't come into the consulting-room to disturb you, because Mrs. Day said Mr. Symonds was coming up to tea; and now he has gone off without seeing me or coming upstairs at all; and you have got the sort of expression Bari has when he has killed a cat. What mischief have you two been plotting?"

Sylvia put her hand through her guardian's arm as she met him at the door of the upstairs sitting-room, which had been made pretty and bright for her in those days some years ago when Eva Ormonde had first come into her life. Eva had only paid two visits to the house in Draper Street, but one of those visits had resulted in the transmogrification of this particular room into a cosy den for Sylvia. And here she and John always had tea together, when his work allowed him to get home for tea at all. He no longer spent so much of his time eating his heart out in his consulting-room—he was often busy for the whole afternoon, but to-day, when the

Rector had gone, he hurried up the stairs to Sylvia's sitting-room.

"I asked Mr. Symonds to stay to tea," he said, replying to the first part of her remark, "but he declared that, after all, in spite of Mrs. Day's temptations, he thought he had better get home. I believe, too, he thought I should want to have a talk with you."

"A talk? Then you *have* been plotting mischief, just as I thought. You exude mischief from every pore;" and Sylvia laughed and pinched his arm.

"I don't know about mischievous plotting," he answered rather ruefully, looking down at the dusky head so near his shoulder; "but we were certainly having a discussion about you, and I expect he thought I should like to talk it over with you now."

"A discussion about *me*? Then certainly you must have been plotting, because there is no reason why you should want to discuss *me*. There's nothing to discuss about. Tell me this very minute what you both said—and why? No wonder you have got the same guilty expression Bari has when he has killed an extra expensive cat in the town."

"The Rector thinks you ought to go away and see the world," John blurted out without further preamble, "and I entirely agree with him."

"See the world? Do you really both think that?" Sylvia's eyes brightened; she drew a long breath. "Oh! Mr. John!" Then her delicate intuition making her aware that the idea was not

so rapturously exciting to her guardian as it was to her, she added quickly—

"But I am perfectly happy here at home with you. I have a lovely time here. Why should I go and see the world? There is no real need for me to go."

"Yes, there is. It is right that you should learn something of a bigger world than Marshdale." John spoke more firmly now; he had seen and understood the brightness in her eyes, the eager indrawing of her breath. "Marshdale has too limited a horizon. You cannot spend your whole life without looking over the horizon's rim. You must go right away and see lots of people, and learn a great many things, and gain plenty of experience, and then ——"

"And then come back," Sylvia put in promptly, when he paused. "I should like to see some of the wonderful places in the world. I want to travel to some of the countries I have read about. And I do love people! I should like to meet quantities of men and women—they are so interesting, it is like reading a story book to meet new people and try to imagine what their lives are like, and what they think and feel. Oh! Mr. John, I should like to see everything there is to be seen, and then—I should want to come back home—to you."

Her grey eyes looked into his with the same childlike love she had always shown him, but his eyes turned away. He could no longer meet her eyes with his former camaraderie!—When he had

watched her walk across the garden in her white gown with the pink tulips in her hand, a new knowledge had suddenly come to him, and he could not look at her again in the old way.

"We must settle about your starting out upon your travels before we begin to fix anything about the coming home," he said with a laugh which did not sound quite natural. "Mr. Symonds thought that perhaps we could arrange something with Miss Ormonde; that perhaps you and she could go abroad together. He advised me to go and have a chat with her; her judgment is good, and she would know what was best for you."

"Oh! yes, she would know that," Sylvia answered simply; "and if she and I could go abroad together, it would be like a kind of fairy tale come true. I can't believe that perhaps I shall see all the lovely things I've read about—the mountains, the lakes; and perhaps the olives, and the orange trees, and the blue sea of the South. But it would make the fairy tale quite perfect if only you could come too."

Before John's eyes there swept a sudden vision of what it would mean to him to walk with Sylvia along flowery Alpine slopes; to be with her in the olive gardens of the South; to watch her eyes shine with joy at the new world opening before them, and he drew in his breath a little sharply. But the years that had gone by since Sylvia first came to him, had taught John Camberley many lessons; and perhaps his recent talk with Henry Symonds had carried on

that teaching. With an effort he pushed aside the tempting thought which for a moment seemed to fill his whole mind; he told himself sternly that he was Sylvia's guardian—only her guardian; that the Rector was right in asserting that it would be crass selfishness to allow her to spend her gracious youth in a small country town, to hinder her from knowing other men: his better self told him that only one right course lay before him. He must let Sylvia go, even though—and at those words his very thoughts halted—even though her going now might mean her staying away for ever.

That was the thought which faced him! It was the knowledge of this ultimate possibility which made the initial step he had resolved to take so very hard in the taking. He had awakened to the truth: he had seen at last that his ward, who was a child only yesterday (or so it seemed to him), was to-day a woman, a lovely and gracious woman: and he could not but be aware that if she went away, other men would not be blind to her grace and loveliness. Other men would woo her. One of these men would almost certainly win her: whilst he, in the house made desolate by her absence, must eat out his heart alone. She thought of him simply as her guardian, her father's friend: how could it be otherwise? He himself had only realised to-day that during all the years since her coming, she had crept closer and closer to his heart, until at last she had completely driven out of it the memory of the woman who had spoilt his youth; completely healed

the old soreness, the old pain. His house without her would be a place of aching desolation, and yet —this new John did not hesitate. He had seen what it was right to do, and he intended to do what was right, without contemplating future contingencies.

"There is no question of my going with you when you go on your travels," he said lightly, in answer to Sylvia's remark. "I am busier than I used to be, and I hope I may go on being more and more busy. I am conceited enough to think that my patients would not want to spare me. So I must stay here."

"I don't believe your patients ever would spare you," Sylvia put in eagerly. "Old Mrs. Russell, down the lane, said to me yesterday, 'Dr. Camberley—he be the doctor they do like best in the town. He've got a way with him.' Oh! no, your patients would hate it if you went away. It is only I who would love to have you with me when I go out to see the world."

"Ah! well"—John's tones were still light, though at what a cost he alone knew—"I should love it too; but I must wait a bit before I take a real big holiday. Meanwhile we will consult Miss Ormonde. She will advise us what to do about your travels. We will go together and see her, and ask whether she will help us."

CHAPTER XVII

"I WOULD RATHER STAY HERE"

"AS I have told Noel several times, the fact of the matter is I feel a beast." Beatrice Crosbie, standing in the drawing-room at the Meadow House, held Eva's hands in hers, and looked into her eyes with a deprecating smile, whilst Noel stood a little apart, watching the two women, but saying nothing.

"Nothing could make you a beast, whatever you may feel," Eva answered, her glance resting with satisfaction on the visitor's graceful form and beautiful face, "and I don't believe there is really anything to make you feel one," she added.

"My dear, I am taking Noel away; I am breaking up your home; I am a hateful intruder who has come in to disturb all your family peace." But at Beatrice's words Eva laughed, and drew her visitor gently on to the sofa, saying—

"You are going to be another sister for Brenda and me, and we don't think of you as an intruder; and I am sure our family peace would have been much more seriously disturbed if you had refused Noel instead of accepting him. Just imagine what he would have been like!" And she glanced mis-

chievously at her brother, who perched himself on the arm of the sofa and pinched her ear.

"Eva is politely trying to say that I should have been a bear with a very sore head," he put in, "and I am afraid she is fairly correct in her assumption. My soreheadedness would have made me unendurable."

"And we have come here to-day expressly to discuss your plans with you," Beatrice said. "I felt as if we had somehow taken you at a disadvantage in springing our engagement upon you, and I wanted to come down here and explain it all. And then I felt that I could never be happy myself, unless I was sure that your future was not going to be spoilt by my happiness."

"Oh! how could you think of such a possibility?" Eva exclaimed a little breathlessly; "your happiness could only make me glad."

"And how about your happiness?" Beatrice's voice was very gentle, her eyes searched the fair face beside her, and Eva flushed.

"I am very happy," she said evasively; "you and Noel are never to worry about me or think I am not enjoying life."

"I wondered"—the gracious lady in her grey gown leant forward a little, and put a hand over Eva's hand—"Noel and I both wondered whether you could make up your mind to put up with us: whether you would come and live in our house in town? We should be so glad to have you." The colour in Eva's face deepened.

"You perfectly dear people," she exclaimed; "I love you for suggesting such a thing, but of course I should not think of making a superfluous spoke in your wheel."

"You would not make a superfluous spoke," Beatrice said earnestly. "You should live your own life exactly as you wish. Noel and I have even planned your sitting-room for you, so that you should be quite independent of us. And you see we are not like a very young couple starting life *à deux*; we shall have my boy—my big and my very dear boy making his home with us."

"You are dears," Eva repeated, looking from Beatrice to Noel with eyes that overflowed with gratitude, "but I could not come and share your new house—at any rate not yet—not in the early days when you ought to have it as much as possible to yourselves. Perhaps some day"—she smiled whimsically—"when I am getting on in years, and feel dull by myself, perhaps then I will come and beg for a corner in your house—but not yet. You must not think I mean to be ungrateful, if I say that I would rather stay on here."

"My dear child, Beatrice and I want you to do just what pleases you best," Noel said affectionately; "and as far as expense goes, there is nothing to prevent you from staying here if you like. Your godmother's legacy sets you above every possible doubt on that score."

"You are sure you will not find it dull if you stay on in this house alone?" It was Beatrice who

asked the question, and Eva answered quickly—

"No—oh no, I don't think it is in my nature to feel dull. Bari and I are never dull"—she glanced through the open window to where the big dog lay stretched at full length, his eyes fixed watchfully upon her—"and besides that, I have Sylvia. Sylvia takes up such a big piece of my life."

"I confess to a consuming curiosity about Sylvia," Beatrice said. "I have a great desire to see her. She must be a very unusual child."

"She is an unusual child," Eva spoke eagerly; "I never met anybody the least like her. But she is not a child any more—not a child in the ordinary sense of the word, though I believe she will always be a child to me!"

"And she and her guardian are great friends of yours?" It was again Beatrice who spoke, and Beatrice's soft eyes observed the little flush that ran over Eva's face, though she answered lightly enough—

"I am afraid I could not by any stretch of imagination call Dr. Camberley a great friend," she said, laughing—and only Beatrice realised that there was something a trifle forced in her laughter; "he is not a sort of person who makes great friends. I believe the Rector is the only real friend he has in Marshdale."

"But he is no longer so hopelessly tabooed, is he?" Noel asked.

"He has some patients now, chiefly because Mr. Symonds, and some of Mr. Symonds' friends

have called him in, but "—Eva hesitated a moment —" I do not think any one is more inclined than before to know him socially. The old feeling about him still holds. Marshdale is a very conservative place; it does not easily forget or forgive."

"What is the thing which Marshdale will not forget or forgive in Dr. Camberley's case?" Beatrice questioned.

"There is some old story about neglect of a patient, a story I have never believed," Eva said with fine scorn. "Nobody who knew Dr. Camberley at all would believe it for a moment. And then he was supposed at one time to have sown a good many wild oats; but that must have been a long while ago—before Sylvia came."

"Perhaps Sylvia's coming made all the difference," Beatrice said musingly.

"Perhaps," Eva responded; "in any case no one could, and I don't think any one does, say a word against Dr. Camberley's behaviour nowadays. It is only the old story of Mr. Henderson's death, and the doctor's alleged neglect, which have never been allowed to sink into oblivion."

"Defend me from the gossip of a one-eyed town like this," Noel exclaimed, rising and moving towards the window, when Bari also rose with a flop of his tail and a shake of his big body, "and there appears to be some truth in the old proverb about talking of angels and you hear the flutter of their wings, for, by an odd coincidence, Dr. Camberley and his ward are coming up the drive at this very moment!"

From the low window of the drawing-room a side view of the drive was obtainable, and over the neatly clipped shrubs Noel had caught a glimpse of John's tall form with Sylvia beside him. "You call Camberley's ward a child: she is a fairly well-grown child, judging by the glimpse I caught of her over the bushes. And I should say rather an unusually striking child too," he added with a laugh. The phrases repeated themselves in Beatrice's mind when, a moment later, the parlourmaid ushered into the room "Miss Brentwood and Dr. Camberley."

"An unusually striking child." Yes, the tall girl was certainly unusual in appearance, and there was something curiously arresting in her personality. The eager vivid face, the grey shining eyes, the soft frame of dusky hair—all these stamped themselves at once upon the onlooker's consciousness; and she realised at the same time what strength of character was demonstrated by the well-chiselled chin, the finely-cut lips, the broad sweep of brow under the shady hat. Into Sylvia's eyes there flashed for an instant a little startled look when she saw a stranger seated beside Eva, but she was not cursed with shyness, and her smile was very sweet and frank as Eva rose, and putting a hand on her shoulder, introduced her to Mrs. Crosby.

"Something very beautiful has happened," she said to Eva in her happy eager voice; "it happened yesterday, and I wanted to come and tell you then, that very minute, but Mr. John said I must wait until to-day."

"You look as if you had come into a fortune," Beatrice said with a kindly glance at the girl's radiant face.

"Oh! it's much better than that," was the quick response—"much, much better! Miss Henderson has told the truth about her father, and it was all a horrible mistake about Mr. John's having been careless. He was never careless at all. Of course *we* were sure all the time he was not negligent—we who knew him." She said the last words with a superb uplifting of her head.

Eva turned quickly towards Camberley, but before she could speak Noel exclaimed heartily—

"I am delighted to hear what Miss Brentwood says. Although I have never paid much attention to local gossip, it was impossible to be entirely ignorant of malicious rumours. And I am very glad to know that rumour has been lying as well as malicious."

Into John's rather sombre eyes there flashed a look of pleasure; and if he answered a little haltingly, and with a shade of embarrassment, his listeners understood and sympathised. Beatrice, standing a little apart from the others, saw the sudden gladness that for a moment shone upon Eva's face, saw it, and realised its full significance better than Eva guessed. The girl offered her congratulations to John quietly enough, but Beatrice's quick ear caught the little thrill in her voice, and her womanly intuition divined what hitherto only one person had dimly guessed. She and Henry Symonds had surprised a secret which Eva was

convinced lay hidden securely in her own heart. And in Beatrice's keeping the secret was safe. Not to a living soul would she ever divulge that glimpse, that chance glimpse she had so unwittingly obtained into another woman's soul.

Henry Symonds had long ago realised that John Camberley's loneliness and misery had set vibrating in Eva's heart chords that had never again been stilled: and now the same realisation had come to Beatrice; and with it came also a great hope that perhaps after all, her laughing suggestion to Noel might materialise. Eva might be the person who would bring joy into John Camberley's life, and play the part of mother to John's ward. If only the tall man with the sombre eyes and rather bitter mouth, could be induced to see things in the same light which seemed to Beatrice quite a radiant illumination, Eva's happiness would be secured; and the whole story might end as the old fairy tales end, "and so they lived happily ever after." It would be a simple solution of so many difficulties, Beatrice reflected, whilst the other four talked in more or less desultory fashion. Obviously this tall lovely girl, who had blossomed out of childhood into a very attractive girlhood, could not remain in the house of a bachelor who had not even reached middle age. Some new arrangement must perforce be made, and made before very long. And what simpler or better arrangement could the wisest counsellor suggest, than the arrangement which seemed there at hand, ready made and only

waiting to be adopted? The reflection ran quickly through Beatrice's busy brain, and only fragments reached her of the conversation passing between her companions, whilst she wove an enchanting scheme for the future of John Camberley, and John Camberley's ward, and Eva. If he had been able to read Mrs. Crosbie's thoughts, John himself would have been unfeignedly amazed, and he would have laughed to scorn the bare notion that he could by any possibility be anything more to Eva Ormonde than the merest acquaintance. True, for Sylvia's sake, he and Eva had drifted from the stiffness of mere acquaintanceship into a certain friendliness; but even the friendliness was of rather a stiff and aloof order, and he and Eva rarely, if ever, met or exchanged more than a few words.

It was some months now since he had seen her, and as he sat and talked to her, he thought how little on the whole she had changed, since the day eight years before when she had run out to the gate to ask for his help. A few delicate lines had pencilled themselves about her eyes; but her eyes themselves had lost none of their old serenity. And if the first freshness and glow of youth were no longer hers, the charm of her face was perhaps more attractive than actual beauty. Weariness and boredom were unknown words in Eva Ormonde's dictionary of life: she was too busy always in loving helpful work for others, to find time to be either bored or weary.

"Mr. John has come up with me to-day to ask

you a most gigantic favour," Sylvia said, when those words of congratulation to Camberley had been spoken, and her hand rested on the shaggy head of the St. Bernard who had walked sedately in from the garden directly he saw his beloved friend arrive. "It is a very big favour, but you must promise you won't say no to it, because it is going to be like the very best sort of fairy story—quite perfect, excepting that Mr. John won't be in it."

"What a very incoherent description!" Eva laughed. "How do you expect me to make head or tail of such a rambling discourse? But if there is anything I can do to help you in any way, of course I will do it." She looked frankly at John. "What is the big favour which has some relationship to a best fairy story?" John's laugh echoed hers, and it did the girl's heart good to hear how much more gladness than of old there was in his laugh.

"We have come to-day to ask you for your advice and help," he said, "because we find that Sylvia is no longer a little child."

"Are you beginning to realize it?" There was a certain tender mockery in Eva's voice. "Well, perhaps it is not surprising that you should not have realised it before. It has come about so gradually. I can hardly believe you are really grown up." And she put a caressing hand on Sylvia's shoulder.

"I am only now becoming dimly alive to the fact," John said; and as for an instant his eyes

rested on Sylvia, who was bending over the big dog, a look shot into them which sent a stab to Eva's heart. Beatrice did not observe that glance, it was seen only by Eva, and it told her so much—so much that John, dear simple soul, had no notion that he had showed. That moment's glance gave Eva a clue to what was in John's heart; in a second she knew, past all doubting, what Sylvia meant to the man who sat watching her, and in that same second something died far down in Eva's own heart. But she gave no sign.

"The Rector and I have been putting our heads together," John went on; "it was really he who first made me understand that Sylvia is on the verge of being grown up."

"On the verge," Sylvia retorted. "I've gone quite over the dizzy brink. I've got there. I *am* grown up. And it isn't really so very extraordinary or unprecedented. I've just got here by degrees, and now I'm really grown up, and it's going to be even lovelier than it was to be a little girl."

"Is it?" Beatrice put in involuntarily, her eyes fixed on the girl's eager face, her mind speculating what fate might have in store for this lovely young thing standing on life's threshold. As has been said, she had not seen that glance of John's which Eva had intercepted; she was still weaving pleasant schemes in which Eva should reign over Camberley's house, and help to guide Sylvia's feet into paths of happiness; and she felt complacently certain that her scheme would for all parties concerned be the

very best one that could by any possibility be matured.

"Yes—I do really believe it will be lovelier to do grown-up things," Sylvia answered her question. "Only I don't quite see how it can be any better, because you see I've had such a perfect time as a little girl. I really believe I shall enjoy every bit of my life as it comes," she added, with sunny philosophy; "there are sure to be beautiful things whatever age one is. But the fairy tale things are coming now, if you will agree," and she turned to Eva. "Mr. John and the Rector have been hatching heavenly plots."

"Have they? What kind of plots?" Eva answered, whilst the others laughed.

"Well, the plots are partly heavenly, partly horrid," Sylvia went on. "Mr. John and the Rector say they think I ought to go away from home, and see the world, and learn things. And the going away from home will be horrid. But—we have come to ask you if you will take me away to see the world, and if you will, that is the heavenly plan. And oh! please do you think you could possibly manage it."

"What a delightful arrangement!" Beatrice said *sotto voce*.

"The Rector thinks it is time Sylvia was dug out of the Marshdale furrow," John said briskly, "and I quite agree with him—his idea is excellent. Furrows are not to be allowed." It was only Eva who realised that her visitor's brisk manner was

assumed, that he was feigning a brightness which he certainly did not feel. "Sylvia and I have been hatching our pet plots since I talked to Mr. Symonds," he continued, "and I am afraid it is I who have chiefly planned what she calls the fairy tale. We want to ask you whether you could anyhow manage to take her abroad for a bit? To Switzerland first, and then perhaps to the Riviera for the winter. She ought to see life: she ought to see men and women;" his tones became suddenly hurried; "there is so much she ought to learn which we cannot teach her in a backwater like Marshdale."

"My dear Eva, what a very ideal arrangement!" Noel exclaimed, before Eva herself could answer. "I really think, Dr. Camberley, we must look upon you as a kind of special Providence. My future wife and I have been thinking so much of what my sister's plans will be when we are married, and if she agrees to your suggestion, I cannot imagine anything better than the plan you propose. Perhaps even"—he glanced mischievously at Beatrice—"perhaps we could look up Eva and Miss Sylvia during our honeymoon."

"It goes on getting more and more like a fairy tale," Sylvia said rapturously; "only to make it quite perfect, Mr. John ought to come too."

"Only Mr. John can't entirely neglect the patients he is slowly getting together," Camberley said, with another of those laughs which Eva recognised

as forced. "You must save up every detail of the fairy tale to tell me when you come home."

"Yes—that will be lovely;" Sylvia turned her glowing face to him; "next best to having you there to see the things with me, will be telling you about them. I shall never be able to leave off talking, and Mrs. Day says now that my tongue clacks like a sewing machine. Oh! the coming back will be twice as happy as the going away!"

"You will not find the backwater very interesting, after you have been out in mid-stream," her guardian said quickly, his eyes looking into her shining eyes.

"I want to sail down the stream for a little while," Sylvia answered, continuing the metaphor, "but I don't want to stay out in it for ever and ever. I shall enjoy it ever so much whilst it lasts, and then I shall want to come home, to the backwater, and to you!"

CHAPTER XVIII

IN SWITZERLAND

"I GOT them for you," he said.

"For me? Oh, how lovely of you! Real edelweiss—and you got it for me?" Sylvia looked at the boy beside her with a smile which gave him a sudden insane desire to drop upon his knees, and kiss the hem of her white gown. But the unconsciousness in the girl's eyes, and his own saving sense of humour, prevented Nigel Danton from carrying out this impulsive wish, and he only looked down at her with something in his glance which gave her an unaccountable wish to hurry back into the hotel and find Eva. Hitherto, during their stay at Drinkenwald, she and Nigel had been on frank, friendly terms, and she had enjoyed her first intercourse with some one so nearly of her own age. But now the look in Nigel's eyes startled her; it made her heart beat oddly, as it had never beaten before. She had lived a life so apart from youth, so singularly aloof from her own generation, and all its thoughts and ways, that she had remained very childlike; and coquetry was entirely foreign to her nature. The boy of twenty-two seemed to be just

a delightful companion, with whom to spend part of the sunny summer days in the little Swiss village ; and until this afternoon Nigel had accepted the frank camaraderie, and had not attempted to play the lover.

" Of course I got the edelweiss for you," he said, emotion giving gruffness to his voice. " I'd try and get any mortal thing I thought you would like."

" Oh ! " Sylvia said rather breathlessly, and her eyes met his with a little puzzled glance.

" I think it's very nice of you to have climbed so far just to please me." And she lifted her eyes to the great mountains whose piles of snow reared itself above the glacier.

" I'd do a jolly lot more than that to please you," Nigel said huskily, his glance resting on her face with hungry longing ; " you—you're so different from all the other girls I've ever seen. You seem " —he frowned in the effort to put his thoughts and feelings into words—" you seem as if you had always lived in a world of your own—you seem like a thing apart," he added shyly, with a certain boyish dislike to expressing himself in language which he would naturally have described as " tosh." But Sylvia had awakened all the poetry in his nature, and no knight of old could have regarded his lady love with more chivalrous devotion, than this twentieth century boy regarded the specimen of modern maidenhood who stood beside him. It was her very lack of the modern touch which appealed to him ! She was so totally unlike the girls

who were his sister's friends, the girls who were more than ready to meet him half way; who talked a slang scarcely less pronounced than his own; who expected amusement, flirtation, kisses or chocolates from the young men of their acquaintance; girls who seemed to belong to a different world from this girl with the grey eyes that were innocent as the eyes of a child.

"Like a thing apart," he repeated slowly, his eyes still upon her face that was upturned towards the snow heights dominating the valley.

"I haven't ever had friends of my own age before," Sylvia answered rather wistfully, turning her eyes towards him again, "that's what makes me seem silly and different."

"Different certainly, but certainly not silly," he corrected with eagerness. "I'm jolly glad you never have had friends of your own age before, if that is what has made you what you are. Didn't your fossil of a guardian allow you to make friends?"

"He's *not* a fossil," Sylvia exclaimed indignantly, a hot wave of resentment surging through her. "What he arranged for me was always the very best thing possible, and I couldn't have been happier if I had tried. And now he thinks I ought to know other people besides himself, and Mr. Symonds and Miss Ormonde, and so——"

"I should jolly well suppose you ought," Danton broke in hotly. "You must have had a deadly dull time always with people such a lot older than yourself."

"I wasn't ever dull." Sylvia looked at him with widely opened eyes of amazement. "I wasn't ever dull for a single instant. And although it is lovely coming away and seeing new places, I shall be ever so glad when the time comes to go home to Mr. John."

"Well! you can't stay with Mr. John all your life," Nigel said quickly; "you don't want to bury yourself in a hole like Marshdale."

"It wouldn't be burying myself to stay in my own home with Mr. John. Nothing could ever make me happier than being there, not even all this loveliness;" and she spread out her hands towards the great landscape with a comprehensive movement that seemed to include the green flower-starred meadow on which they stood, the glacier winding down behind the chestnut slopes, the snowy glory of the mountains against the blue summer sky. "I love it all, every bit of it," she added, "but home comes first."

"And supposing somebody asked you to leave Marshdale, and to make another home somewhere else?" young Danton spoke rather breathlessly.

"Leave Marshdale?" Sylvia's tone and glance equally showed surprise. "Oh! I shouldn't ever want to do that, and nobody would ever want me to do it."

"Wouldn't they?" Nigel's brown eyes flashed. "There'll be plenty of people wanting you to leave Marshdale. Has it never dawned upon you"—

his voice dropped a little—" that some fellow will want to marry you ? "

A little dreamy smile crossed Sylvia's face, a light gleamed in her eyes.

" Sometimes I've thought there would some day come a prince, like the princes in the fairy tales," she said, " and I've wondered what he would be like, and whether he would make me think of a real fairy prince or of the knights of olden time. But they were only dream pictures." It was obvious that she spoke quite impersonally, and that she had no thought of associating her companion with any of these dream visions. She looked like some lovely dreaming child, standing there in the flower-starred meadow, with a little flush upon her face.

" Dreams sometimes come true," Nigel said softly, half longing, half hesitating to awaken the slumbering woman who lay behind those shining innocent eyes. " Would you be glad if the dreams came true ? " He moved a fraction nearer to her, but she did not notice his movement ; she was still walking in some dreamland of her own, and he was outside its boundaries.

" I think so," she answered, pausing a little over her words ; " only, you see, I can't be quite sure about anything until the prince comes, can I ? "

" I say, you are not going through the world all your days talking in fairy language, are you ? " the boy said rather wistfully. " We can't all be princes and knights and marvellous beings like that. We're only just ordinary flesh-and-blood human beings,

but—all the same——" He paused, and Sylvia's glance turned from the snow mountains to his face.

"All the same what?" she questioned, her voice still dreamy.

"Well—I'd like you to understand," he said, with a certain bluntness which was only the outward sign of an honest and straightforward nature, "I didn't mean to say anything like this for ages, but I'd like you to understand what I feel about you—even if I'm not a prince." Even to Sylvia's unaccustomed ears the tone of his voice conveyed something of his meaning. The dreaminess left her eyes, a startled expression leapt into them, but she did not speak.

"I didn't mean to say this now," Nigel repeated, "I meant just to go on being friends until perhaps I could have made you care for me—not as much as I do for you, but just a little bit. Only, when you look so sweet, how can I help telling you straight out now all about it?"

"But"—Sylvia faltered, the startled look growing in her eyes—"but I——"

"Don't say anything that fixes it all up, and sends me off straight away," Nigel broke in; "give me a chance of showing you how tremendously I care. I believe I've taken you by surprise, but don't chuck me as a friend, just because I want you to let me be something more."

"Something more?" It seemed as though Sylvia found it impossible to originate a remark.

She could only echo his phrases, and he came quite close to her, and put his hand on her shoulder.

"You see, the thing is, I love you," he said simply; "I want you to be my wife."

"Your wife?" The colour poured over the girl's face, she drew away from his hand. "I thought we were just friends, and it was so lovely to find a friend. But you're just young like myself —I couldn't be your wife," she continued with a naïve and unconscious cruelty. The pain which at her words shot into his eyes stirred her ignorance into wakefulness.

"Oh, I am sorry," she said, "I am sorry. I didn't mean to hurt you; I didn't know I was hurting you. But—I thought you just wanted me for a friend as I want you."

Again unconsciously she stabbed him, again his eyes betrayed him, and the girl who all her life had shrunk from hurting any living creature, who all her life had tended and cared for everything that suffered or was sad, caught her breath in a little sob.

"I can't bear you to look as if I had hurt you," she said, "and I never meant to do it. I would do everything I could to make you happy, if I knew how."

Over Nigel's face there flashed a sudden light, as suddenly extinguished.

"There's only one way in which you could make me happy," he said, "and that's just the one way you've shown me you can't take. You've made it

pretty plain you don't care for me as I care for you."

"I'm sorry, I'm so sorry," Sylvia said again. "You see, I never thought about anybody caring for me in that way, excepting as a sort of far-off dream."

"And now you know it isn't a far-off dream, but a reality, an every-day reality," he persisted, "could you try to think about it differently?" She looked at him with a little puzzled air, and shook her head.

"I—don't know," she said, "I don't think so. It makes me feel as if there was such a very great deal I don't understand; and—I just want you as a friend who is young like myself—not—not——"

"Not as your husband?" Nigel spoke gently. "I'd be awfully good to you. I'd do my best to make you happy."

"Ah! but I couldn't be happy always away from Marshdale and my own home," she cried. "Please let us just be friends as we were before, and don't let me hurt you. I can't bear hurting anybody in the world. Must we spoil everything? Can't we just be friends?"

The boy by her side was touched by the childish appeal, even though the very words Sylvia used dashed his hopes with a cruel certainty impossible to gainsay.

"You know you are asking a jolly hard thing," he said boyishly, "but I'll try to do what you want, just because I care about you such a fearful lot.

And if you did by a lucky chance get to care for me the same way, why it would be all right, wouldn't it?"

"Yes, I suppose so"—a shadow of fear lay in Sylvia's eyes—"but I would rather we did not even think or speak about that part of it. And I am afraid," she added with characteristic honesty, "I am afraid the sort of caring you want me to feel, will not come."

"We'll risk that," Nigel answered more briskly, with the cheerful conviction of the born optimist, feeling that whilst Sylvia did not decline his further acquaintance, and consented to continue the friendship, all was not lost! He was conscious that in a moment of impulse he had gone near to wrecking all his hopes completely, and for a moment he had been disposed to curse his own impetuous folly. But now that Sylvia agreed to allow matters to remain on their old friendly footing, his spirits rose. After all, the game was still in his hands—more or less in his hands, he mentally corrected, remembering the shadow in the girl's eyes, the determined set of her chin! But at any rate he could make the best possible use of the remaining days at Drinkenwald, long days upon the mountains, long evenings under the stars. He would do his utmost to win Sylvia herself to his way of thinking: and he would enlist Miss Ormonde on his side! That was his final reflection—he would certainly try to make Miss Ormonde see the whole affair from his point of view, and persuade her to help him to persuade

Sylvia. But it was Sylvia herself who first enlightened Eva as to the train of events; a rather quiet and thoughtful Sylvia who lingered in Eva's room that evening, after they had both gone upstairs to bed. She stood so long beside the dressing-table, absently fingering the necklace she had just unclasped from the elder woman's neck, that Eva looked round at her in surprise.

"What is it, dear?" she asked. "You don't seem quite like yourself to-night. Are you worried about anything?"

"Yes, I believe I am." Sylvia's smile flashed out. "You see, something quite new has all at once come into my life to-day, and I believe I do feel just—worried."

"Tell me about it"—Eva put a hand on the girl's shoulder—"unless it is something you would rather not discuss with me," she added quickly, with an instinctive dread of forcing another person's confidence; "just tell me whatever you like to tell, if I can help you."

"I like to tell you," Sylvia said simply. "It's Mr. Danton; he asked me to-day if I would marry him."

"That is not a very surprising or unprecedented sort of request," Eva said lightly, her arm drawing Sylvia closer, whilst her heart gave a sudden leap of which she realised the full import and significance. "Did you never realise that some day some one would want you to marry him?"

"Yes," Sylvia spoke slowly, "but it all seemed

very far away, not anything that might happen now. And—I am afraid I have hurt Mr. Danton, and I can't bear hurting people."

"You have hurt him, why?" Eva's voice sharpened a little: Sylvia's words stilled the leap at her heart. "Why have you hurt Mr. Danton?" she repeated with a sort of hurry in her voice.

"Because I said straight out then and there that I didn't want to be married, and that I couldn't marry him. You see—I like him very much as a nice friend of my own age, but I don't want him as anything else."

"Do you mean you don't care for him enough?" There was still that sharp note in Eva's voice, a note of which she herself was unaware.

"I think I must mean that," Sylvia answered doubtfully. "When he said I should have to go away from Marshdale, and have a home somewhere else, I knew I did not want to do it. How could I go away, and have a new home with a husband who was quite strange to me?"

"He wouldn't be strange to you." Eva laughed, not very easily. "If you cared for him, you would have learnt to know him and be his close friend during your engagement; and when you married him, you would not feel he was a stranger."

"I like Nigel Danton," Sylvia spoke slowly and thoughtfully, "I like him very much, but it seems as if the sort of caring you talk about was something quite different."

"Something quite different." That phrase lin-

gered in Eva's mind. There was a perceptible pause before she answered the girl's hesitating words.

"Perhaps," she said, after that perceptible pause, "perhaps the liking would grow into something deeper." As she said the words her eyes wavered a little under the puzzled glance in Sylvia's clear eyes; it almost seemed as if she shrank from meeting that clear glance.

"If I promised to do now what he wants, do you think I should learn to care more and more?" Sylvia asked doubtfully. "Does it happen like that?" There was a falter in the voice that uttered the childish question, and the falter made Eva's heart contract.

"Sylvia dear," she said, with again a touch of flurry in her tones, "don't let us talk about it any more to-night. It—it is difficult to see things quite in right proportion when one's thoughts are rather in a whirl. Shall we sleep upon it now, and talk it over again to-morrow?" Something of the flurry of emotion stirring in the mind of her usually serene friend, had communicated itself to Sylvia. There was a new restlessness in her voice and manner.

"Yes," she said, "let us go to bed now, and talk about it again to-morrow. I want to settle quite certainly once for all what I ought to do. I wish" —a sudden wistfulness crept into her voice—"I wish I could talk it all over with Mr. John. He always knows directly what is best. I think he has a very clear sort of sight," she added quaintly; "Mr. John always knows."

"A very clear sort of sight." When Sylvia had gone, and Eva was left alone, the words still sounded in her ears. "Mr. John has a very clear sort of sight." What would "Mr. John" say, she wondered, if he could have overheard her recent conversation with Sylvia? How much would that clear vision of his have seen and understood? And with the thought a flush crept into Eva's face, and she stood very still beside the crude little dressing-table, her eyes meeting their own troubled reflection in the not less crude little looking-glass.

"Why may I not just once fight for my own hand?" she whispered, as though addressing an invisible listener. "Why must I stand aside? Nigel Danton is more suited to Sylvia in every way —in age, in looks, in everything. And if she——" Her thoughts broke off short. The flush deepened on her face. With a shamed expression in her eyes she turned away from the looking-glass, and began walking up and down the room with hurried steps. Where had her thoughts been leading her, those thoughts which broke off with such suddenness? She had been allowing her own heart to speak, to run riot—she had been letting herself dream of some remote contingency which might occur should Sylvia agree to marry young Danton. And by what right did she dream such dreams? What business had she to give free rein to her imagination? That expression she had surprised in John Camberley's eyes on the day when he had come to the Meadow House with Sylvia only a few weeks

ago, did it actually mean all that she had read into it, or was it not conceivable that if Sylvia was married to Nigel Danton, if John Camberley's house was left unto him desolate, then in his desolation he might turn to the woman who for years had been Sylvia's friend?

Alone in her room as she was, she caught her breath a little when this thought flashed through her mind; she caught her breath, and for a moment there came to her a queer fleeting little vision of all it would mean to her, supposing that John should turn to her for help and comfort in a time of loneliness!

After all she was much more fitted than Sylvia, both by age and experience, to be the companion and helpmate of a man nearing the forties, and with a bitter past behind him! The reflection came almost involuntarily, and she did not thrust it from her. She would not thrust it from her. She was shaken by an unaccustomed tumult of emotion; her usually restrained and serene nature all at once rose up in revolt. Why should she stand aside? Why should she be sent empty away, whilst upon a girl who stood on the threshold of life, there was bestowed a gift, the value of which so young a girl could neither appreciate nor understand?

And it would not be difficult to influence Sylvia now—now that she was hesitating at the parting of the ways. The girl had come to her for counsel, and if she chose to give such counsel

as best suited her own purpose, the game was in her own hands! Sylvia was more ready to be guided by her than by any one else in the world excepting John Camberley himself; and it would be easy, fatally easy, to persuade her to engage herself to Nigel Danton, in the comfortable conviction that liking might eventually ripen into love.

John had wished his ward to see life, to meet other men. He must have been well aware that amongst the men she met, many would be attracted by her, and she might be attracted by one of them. He must have known, past all doubting, that the probabilities were all in the direction of Sylvia being drawn by youth; that when he allowed her to leave Marshdale, she would not return to her home the heartwhole girl who had left it. He must have known these things, so the argument ran in Eva's mind—he must have known them, therefore he would be prepared for whatever might come. It would be no great shock or surprise to him, supposing that Sylvia did engage herself to young Danton, or to any other suitable man. And Nigel was eminently suitable. He was not only young; he was good looking, strong and manly, with plenty of this world's goods; a healthy-minded, healthy-bodied Englishman, such a man as any guardian might welcome as a husband for his ward. "And Sylvia is so very youthful for her age," a specious voice whispered in Eva's own heart, "she is little more than a child. Almost unconsciously she will learn to love Nigel Danton, if once she and he are engaged.

It would be a splendid match for her. He would make a girl very happy; and the chances are that she would fall in love with him in the real old-fashioned way, if he was given an opportunity to change pleasant companionship into something deeper."

That specious voice within her heart argued well and persuasively, and for many minutes she stood still in the centre of the room, listening to those persuasive arguments, letting herself dream of a wonderful future of her own, if Sylvia was no longer part of John Camberley's household.

"It is simply your foolish fancy that leads you to suppose he cares for the child more than a guardian might care for a young ward," the specious voice resumed; "you have read into his eyes something that was never there. He wished Sylvia to see the world; and that obviously means that he wishes her to marry. If she is married—and right away from him for ever—then you——"

The specious voice ceased suddenly. Some inner force stronger than the voice checked its utterance; and with a quick forward movement Eva turned to the window, and flinging it wide open leant far out into the night. Overhead the great stars were set like jewels in the indigo sky; the mountains loomed dimly—grey giant shapes against a starry background. A tiny wind shivered down from the heights, carrying on its breath the fragrance of the flowers that grew in the pastures, and whispering a little song amongst the chestnuts

down by the stream. The whisper of the wind and the murmur of the stream were the only sounds that broke the stillness of the night, and it seemed to Eva as if the world of stars above had all at once drawn much nearer to the world which lay around her. The stillness soothed her. The star-sown sky, and the great dim mountains gave her a sense of restfulness; some of the turmoil that raged within her was quieted into peace.

"God is our help and strength—a very present help in trouble." The words sprang involuntarily to her lips. She leant a little further out of the window, as though to take in more fully the sense of vastness given her by the mountains and the stars—the sense of vastness and of peace.

"I think I was mad," she said under her breath, "mad to let those thoughts come into my mind, and to stay there for a single instant. Sylvia does not care in the least for young Danton, as a woman should care for the man she marries: she is never likely to care in that way. And I knew it. And—I am ashamed of myself." Her eyes lifted themselves again to the starry sky. "I am ashamed of myself. But I will do the right thing now. However hard it may be, I will do the right thing now!"

CHAPTER XIX

ON THE BRINK

THE path, if path it could be called, was very narrow. It cut across the face of green slopes that went steeply up from it on one side towards the towering grey rocks above; and on the other it showed a surface smooth as a billiard ball, going down with a terrifying sheerness into an unseen depth below. Nigel Danton walked first along the narrow path, acting as pioneer to Sylvia, who followed him slowly, her head held very erect, her eyes very bright. She was not sure that she altogether liked this shelf of a path cutting across the green smoothness of the slopes that went so sheer up and so sheer down. But she recognised that she and her companion were in this position by her wish and suggestion, and she did not wish to hamper him by any exhibition of foolish tremors. She and Nigel had been for a walk amongst the mountains that ringed Drinkenwald round, and she had proposed a return to the valley by a short cut across the pastures, the short cut being represented by the path they now followed. Nigel had demurred a little to her suggestion. His knowledge of moun-

tain paths and dizzy mountain slopes was greater than hers, and he was not quite certain whether she would really like, as much as she fancied she would like it, that tiny shelf which cut the smooth slope in two.

Sylvia realised at this moment that she did not like the tiny shelf at all! But once embarked upon it, she would have liked less to turn round and go back to the point at which they had first entered it, than to hold her head high and go on, hoping every minute that the worst was nearly over, that round the next bend the shelf might join some path more worthy of the name! Overhead the sky was very blue, very clear: on the other side of the valley into which the green smoothness on her left slid so steeply, a line of giant snows cut across the clear blueness, but Sylvia dared not trust her eyes to look across to their white glory. The yawning chasm that seemed to open between her and them was too wide, too vast to be looked across with equanimity. The green smoothness of the slopes gave her a queer little inner sense of shuddering dismay, of which she was more than half ashamed.

"We shall jolly soon strike a path wide enough for five men to walk abreast," Nigel called cheerily over his shoulder. "I'm sorry I let you come along here; it's not very pleasant walking unless you are used to this sort of thing."

"And I'm not," Sylvia answered with a tiny shake in her voice, "I'm very stupid. I've always

lived in a town, and this is the first time I've ever seen anything outside England, but I will just follow you straight on."

"That's right." There was still a cheery and encouraging ring in Nigel's voice—he had noticed the falter in the girl's tones, and it gave him an unpleasant sense of responsibility. "Follow steadily, look at my back, and not at the view. We can save up the view for later on, when we have more foothold. It's awfully sporting of you to have wanted to take a short cut like this." His sentence ended with an odd abruptness of which Sylvia, absorbed though she was in the terrifying sensations of the moment, was aware; and a second later she also became aware that her guide had stopped almost as abruptly as he had fallen silent.

"What is it?" the girl exclaimed, startled she hardly knew why, "what has happened?"

"Don't worry." Some of the gay confidence had left Nigel's voice; it was evident that he spoke now with something of an effort. "We shall get along without much bother; only—the path has crumbled away a bit just ahead of us. It gives us rather a narrow foothold."

"Oh!" It was the only word that came to Sylvia's lips, and her face went very white when Nigel paused, and over his shoulder she saw what it was that had brought him to a sudden standstill. Just beyond where he stood, the path, such as it was, had crumbled almost completely away, and scarcely anything was left but the slippery green

slope on the one hand and the sheer green slope on the other.

"We could turn and go back," the boy said doubtfully, glancing over his shoulder at Sylvia's white face, "or I could help you over this gulf to the path beyond." He tried to speak lightly, but it was not a conspicuous success; and at the mere suggestion of going back along the perilous way they had come, Sylvia shook her head with a little shiver.

"I don't want to be silly," she answered, "but I don't think I can go back. I don't believe I can turn round, and it is such a long way to the place where we left the wide path."

"Yes, confound it, it is," Nigel said, "and I believe you're right, it would be a bit silly to go back. We'd better make the best of a tiresome job, and go on. I'll creep along that crumbly bit, and then you give me your hand, and I'll help you over. We shall soon do it. Better take the plunge as quickly as possible. It's no use to shiver on the brink."

And to encourage his companion, he laughed, not a very mirthful laugh. With her heart beating like a sledge hammer, her limbs not too steady, and her face very white, Sylvia stood watching him whilst he crept slowly and cautiously along the crumbling and dangerous edge. Never once did she glance downwards to the valley in those abysmal depths below, or up to the grey rocks overhead, or across the valley to the snows glistening in the afternoon sunshine. Her eyes were fixed with almost agonised anxiety upon the tall athletic form ahead of her,

and when presently he held out his hand, she put hers into it with the trusting confidence of a child.

"Put your feet exactly where I tell you," Nigel said quietly. "You are being simply splendid. This gap in the path is a horrid piece of bad luck." Sylvia did not answer, because speech was impossible to her. She could only concentrate every faculty upon carrying out with the minutest care every instruction given her by her guide: she was incapable of speech. Even the narrow path she had just left, and the no less narrow one that lay beyond, seemed a way of safety, compared to this crumbling insecurity upon which her feet seemed to balance on little more than air. But of the fear that sickened her heart she showed no outward sign, excepting by the whiteness of her face, and a certain tightening of the line of her mouth. And the shadow of it lay in her eyes. But she never hung back; she never dragged unwarrantably upon the hand she held. With the quiet determination that was characteristic of her, she moved forward at Nigel's bidding, drawing from him again an expression of admiration and approval.

"You *are* plucky," he exclaimed, "you are a good sportsman—ah!—my God!" His sentence broke off with a sudden jerk, and the last words dropped from his lips in a tone of unmitigated horror; for, even as he spoke, a piece of rock, detached from one of the grey giants overhead, gathering impetus as it rolled, came tumbling down the green slope on their right, and struck Sylvia

at the precise moment when one more step forward would have landed her in comparative safety upon the path. But the unexpected fashion in which the falling rock struck sharply against her, and then bounded on down the smooth greenness below, upset the girl's already uncertain balance. Her foot slipped, she made a frantic but unavailing effort to right herself, and then, before Nigel could do anything to save or stop her, her hand dropped from his, and the next moment his horrified eyes saw her slipping and sliding down the treacherous smoothness of the mountain side, her hands clutching vainly at its slipperiness, as she, like the grey rock, gathered momentum with every inch she slid.

For one ghastly second the young man stood watching that little slipping figure, watched it with eyes that were glued as by some ghastly fascination to the terrible sight. She had slid away from him with such rapidity that he could not even catch at her hand, or at the fluttering corner of her skirt; and with that flashing knowledge which comes to those who are themselves, or who see others, in deadly peril, he realised that in another moment he must see the girl he loved disappear over the sharply defined edge where the green slope ended with such significant abruptness.

"My God!" he said again, when at the end of that second of silent horror, he stepped off the path, and on to the slippery grass, with the grim determination to follow Sylvia even to the fatal edge. And then he fell silent, because in such

moments as those, there is no speech possible to one weak human being, excepting to call upon the name of God. To Nigel watching, it seemed as though years and years went by, whilst Sylvia slid at swifter and swifter pace down the smooth green slope, and the sight of her small clutching hands that tore in vain at the short grass stabbed at his heart like an actual bodily pain. And then something stopped that ceaseless slipping: by a sheer miracle it seemed to the man who watched, the girl's headlong course to the edge of the abyss was stayed.

What obstacle it was which at the eleventh hour had caught and held her, he could not see, but her rapidly moving form was suddenly still—she lay on the verge of the precipice—but something invisible to him had hindered her from going over the edge. The whole thing had happened in a few short seconds, those seconds which to the watcher seemed like long years;—and he did not hesitate for an instant. Digging his heavily nailed boots hard into the short grass, moving with extreme caution, with the help of his alpenstock, he crept down the perilous slope, feeling his way at every step, scarcely daring to breathe, lest any untoward movement should cause his feet to slip. Only once he called out a word of cheer and encouragement to the girl below him.

"Stay perfectly quiet," he cried; "don't try to move. I am coming to help you." And after that one sentence he crept on in silence, a tense

silence broken only by the whisper of the wind amongst the tree tops in the valley, and the far-away jangling of cow bells on the heights. How long that slow creeping downwards lasted, Nigel never knew. All he could afterwards remember was a sensation of moving on eternally over an endless green smoothness that ended in an abyss.

He dared not think beyond each moment of finding a precarious foothold: his mind was wholly concentrated upon reaching the place where that still figure lay. And when at last he was close beside her, and realised that she had been caught and held by the projecting stump of a pine tree on the very edge of a sheer precipice, a shudder ran through him. If she had slid down the slope a few inches either way to right or left she must inevitably have fallen over the ghastly cliffs below: and even as things were, could he save her? Could he save her? The thought swung to and fro in his mind, but it swung there automatically, and without his volition. Could he save her?

Steadying himself by her side as well as he was able, he stooped down with exceeding care and laid a hand on her arm. He realised what unerring care was needed at this critical juncture—for one false step on his part, one over-hurried move might precipitate for both Sylvia and for himself a fate the mere thought of which chilled his blood. Her life and his own hung on a thread, the slenderest of threads, and only unwavering presence of mind, and unerring judgment, were of any avail.

Sylvia's eyes were shut as though she dared not open them upon the precipice that frowned below, but as Nigel touched her arm, her eyes opened, and she looked into his face with an expression of dazed horror. Her lips moved, but no sound came from them—and she lay very still, perhaps instinctively realising that in utter stillness was her only hope.

"If you can take my hand," Nigel said, speaking very slowly and clearly, because the dazed expression in her eyes gave him a feeling that she was only half conscious of her surroundings—"if you can take my hand and let me get you on to your feet, I think I can help you back to the path. Look only at me," he added, his speech growing clearer and more emphatic—"look only at me, and concentrate your whole thoughts on what we have to do. You are not hurt?" He tried to keep his anxiety out of his voice, tried to speak in normal level accents, in order to steady Sylvia's nerves, and she answered him quietly, though her voice shook a little.

"No, no, I'm not hurt," she said. "I will try —to do what you tell me." For a second she closed her eyes again, in an effort to collect herself, and when she re-opened them, there was a new steadiness in her glance, the dazed horror had left it. "I will come whenever you say I must," she said, "only are you sure that my weight upon you will not drag you down?"

"Drag me down?" Nigel actually contrived a little laugh. "Of course you won't drag me down.

I've got my alpenstock to steady me, and the nails in my boots give me a jolly good foothold." He spoke as lightly as though the question under consideration was merely one of strolling over English downs, certainly not as though they were in imminent peril of their lives; and again as he intended it to do, the confidence in his voice acted on Sylvia like a tonic, and gave her courage. "Put your hands into mine now," he said cheerily, "pull yourself up gradually, and as I tell you, keep your eyes fixed on me."

With quiet and implicit confidence, Sylvia carried out all his directions. Never letting her eyes leave his face, she put her two hands into one of his, whilst his other hand gripped his alpenstock upon which he threw his weight. Slowly, very, very slowly the girl lifted herself up, first to her knees, then to her feet—and during the whole slow process she never cast a downward glance at the gulf behind her, nor an upward look at the treacherous slope above.

"Dig your heels hard into the grass," Nigel commanded, when with difficulty she stood upright beside him, "keep a firm hold of my hand, and don't turn your head to right or left. Look steadily at my back as we climb up."

Still implicitly obedient to his words she moved with him up the slope, using her utmost endeavour not to lean heavily on his supporting hand, conquering by sheer force of will the tremors that over and over again threatened to shake her from head

to foot. She realised that Nigel's life as well as hers depended upon her self-control, and though more than once panic fear seized her, she fought it down and held on her way with a grim determination which showed itself in her white face and tightly compressed lips, and in the shining of her eyes. To both Nigel and Sylvia afterwards that upward climb seemed to have stretched itself out into interminable length; and when they reached the comparative security of the ledge which called itself a path, Nigel pulled the girl down to the grass beside him, saying with a breathless gasp that was almost a sob—

"I feel as if we had lived through about twenty years; I didn't think I could have got you back here safely. It was just touch and go."

Two very white and shaken young people came back that evening to the hotel at Drinkenwald, and for several days after the adventure on the mountains, Sylvia went about looking like a ghost, with a sort of horror in her eyes.

"I dream of it every night," she said to Eva at the end of a week; "every night I am slipping, slipping, slipping, down smooth green slopes that end in a bottomless gulf. It is very silly, but I dread going to sleep, because that dream always comes, and after I have dreamt it, I wake shivering all over. And the mountains I used to love seem all at once to have grown frightening and strange."

Eva looked at her with loving concern. The dark shadows under her eyes, the shadow of fear

in the eyes themselves, and the nervous flurry in her speech, all gave evidence to a nerve tension which was very foreign to Sylvia's naturally buoyant and peaceful temperament.

"Shall I tell you what I think?" Eva said brightly, "I think a change of scene is indicated. Supposing we leave Drinkenwald, and try some other place in quite different sort of country."

The relief that shot into Sylvia's eyes told its own story, and Eva went on discussing plans and places, noticing with pleasure that some of the strain on the girl's face died away, and a more natural expression took its place.

"I should like to go somewhere else," Sylvia said; "there seems so much to think over too, and I believe I could think better if I was in quite new surroundings."

"So much to think over?" Eva questioned, and Sylvia nodded her head, the colour creeping softly into her cheeks.

"You see, Nigel—Mr. Danton—does still want me to do—what he asked. And I don't think he really feels like being just friends with me. And sometimes I wonder whether I ought not to say yes to him, because you see he saved my life. Oughtn't I to show my gratitude to him by doing what he wants?"

Eva's earlier struggle with herself helped her now to take the right step without any hesitation or doubt. That big fight which she had fought out—the fight from which she had emerged a conqueror.

made this second piece of self-conquest comparatively easy. Only comparatively! For the conquest of self is never lightly achieved; it is always a hard-fought fight, a hardly won victory. But she did not pause before giving her answer to the girl who looked at her with such wistful eyes, the girl who spoke in so faltering a voice.

"It would be no more right now to give yourself to Nigel Danton, than it would have been before the accident," Eva said with decision. "Sylvia dear, it is exactly like you to suggest making a big sacrifice for a man just because he has done something big for you. But you would spoil his life as well as your own, if you married him simply out of gratitude."

"But I would try to do everything I could to make him happy," Sylvia said earnestly. "I do like him very much, and perhaps love would come."

For an instant temptation rose and looked Eva in the face again. After all, was the girl perhaps right? Love might possibly come at last, if the liking was already deep and genuine. But Eva put the specious argument from her almost impatiently. The time for deceiving herself was past. That first victory had made self-deceit no longer possible.

"No," she said emphatically, "the friendly liking you have for Mr. Danton is never going to deepen into any other feeling. You cannot marry him merely because he saved you from going over the precipice. Both you and he would be paying too big a price."

"But I owe him so much," Sylvia persisted, "and it seems as though"—she frowned with the effort to express herself clearly—"as though I ought to give him the life he saved, if he really wants it so much." In spite of the ache at her own heart the naïveté of the words made Eva smile. They showed her perhaps more than anything else could have done, the youthful innocence of Sylvia's outlook; her complete ignorance of the great issues involved in all that Nigel craved.

"To give Nigel an imperfect thing would not be a very good gift, nor would it be an adequate expression of gratitude," Eva said gently; "unless you could give him the best of your love as well as your life, I do not think he would be content. Some day you will understand better what I mean; some day when the real prince comes, you will know that nobody can really understudy the prince's part. Do not either give or take anything less than the very best, little Sylvia: wait until the very best comes to you!"

CHAPTER XX

IN THE SOUTH

"SURELY it is Miss Ormonde? I wonder whether you remember me after all these years?" The speaker paused in the middle of the hotel lounge and looked inquiringly at Eva, who had just come into it from the garden. Her thoughts were far away from her immediate surroundings, and as for a moment she looked into the face of the handsome woman who had addressed her, it was evident that she thought the stranger was mistaken in claiming acquaintance. Then a gleam of recognition shot into her eyes.

"Mrs. Danvers?" she said slowly; "I believe it is Mrs. Danvers? Please forgive me for not knowing you just at once. My thoughts were wool gathering——"

"And it is a long time since we met," Nina Danvers put in when Eva paused, "since those days when you were so kind to me at Marshdale;" and she sighed as though the memory of that long-past day and of the tragedy which had marked it still had power to make her sad. The two women stood in the centre of the comfortable hotel lounge, and the glowing sunlight of the South fell full upon

Nina Danvers' face, showing with an almost blatant cruelty the fine lines round her eyes and mouth, the hardness in the eyes themselves. She was a very handsome woman still, Eva was fain to acknowledge as much; but time had given no softening or mellowness to her features, and it seemed to the younger woman, that she had lost some indefinable charm she had possessed on the day when her husband died at the Meadow House.

"I caught sight of you just as you came up the garden path," Mrs. Danvers went on, "and you have altered so little that I felt almost certain you were Miss Ormonde. You know—well, of course you know that your brother and his delightful wife have taken my house?" Eva smiled assent. "I could not bear the house and its associations any more," Mrs. Danvers said with another of those sighs which appeared to form part of her repertoire. "I made up my mind to wander—to wander for quite a long time, and the dear house, in which I had been so happy, was exactly what Mr. Ormonde wanted."

"They write of it as if it suited them admirably." Eva followed Mrs. Danvers to one of the big sofas and sat down beside her. "They were married just before we came away."

"We?" Mrs. Danvers glanced interrogatively at her companion. "Ah, yes—I was going to ask you about the girl who was with you in the garden; I thought she must belong to you in some way. Is she a niece? She is such a lovely girl."

"We are not relations, but her guardian asked me to bring her abroad for a time. She has lived a very quiet life and he wished her to travel."

"Her guardian? Who is her guardian?" Mrs. Danvers asked the question sharply; the remembrance of a certain guardian in Marshdale, and of her own visit to the guardian, floated up from some inner recesses of her mind. "Whose ward is she?"

"Miss Brentwood's guardian is Dr. John Camberley," Eva answered; and as she spoke remembrance also awoke in her mind, and one special episode of the tragic scene which had been enacted in the library of the Meadow House was re-enacted before her mental vision. The woman who now sat beside her, good-looking, well dressed, smiling, had on that day crouched back in the armchair in a little huddled heap, her hands stretched out towards the doctor who had come to help her husband, her voice speaking in pleading accents to the man who had only looked at her with a certain scornful bitterness.

"So you are travelling with John Camberley's ward—how very interesting, and what a curious coincidence!"

"Coincidence?" Eva repeated the word a little vaguely, whilst the episode out of that tragic hour of more than eight years before, painted itself more and more clearly on her mind.

"Yes, it is really quite a coincidence." Something of eagerness had crept into Nina Danvers' rather languid tones. "Dr. Camberley is a very old

friend of mine; and although for many years our paths have run apart, I still look upon him as a great friend. And it is most interesting—most interesting and strange that his ward should be here in the same hotel. I believe I saw her once when she was a little girl." Nina's voice became reminiscent; she frowned as though her memory were being taxed, whereas, as a matter of fact, every incident of her visit to John's garden was vividly before her.

"You have seen Sylvia before?" Eva glanced curiously at her companion.

"Yes—long ago." Mrs. Danvers sighed another of her effective sighs. "It was before I left Marshdale, after all your great kindness to me. I felt I must go and thank Dr. Camberley for his help, and I stopped the cab at his house on the way to the station. I saw Dr. Camberley's little ward in his garden, but I only recollect her as a child in a blue overall, quite an every-day little girl. She made no impression on me. She was not a pretty child."

"No—I suppose she was not exactly what would be called a pretty child," Eva said thoughtfully, "but she was always unique."

"Unique?" Nina Danvers laughed indulgently. "You evidently see her through rose-coloured spectacles, Miss Ormonde. I don't imagine she was really anything more than an ordinary child, though I am bound to say she has grown up a very attractive-looking girl."

"She was never an ordinary child," Eva answered with mild obstinacy; "*nobody* could have looked

upon Sylvia as ordinary. She was always just herself—and a very exceptional self. It is the same thing now. She is not in the least an ordinary girl; she has lived a life so unlike the lives of other girls of her age."

"Oh! indeed!" The exclamation was a question, and Eva, her thoughts intent upon Sylvia, treated it as such.

"Yes, she has lived a very unusual life. Dr. Camberley had his own special theories about a girl's upbringing, and he carried out his theories."

"How funny!" Nina said pensively. "How funny to think of dear old John with theories about the bringing up of girls!"

The casual utterance of the words "Dear old John" roused in Eva a hot feeling of resentment, but the resentment was not visible either in her voice or manner.

"Dr. Camberley himself chiefly educated Sylvia," she said, "and the Rector gave her lessons in some things, and she came to me for her music."

"How funny!" Mrs. Danvers repeated. "She never went to school, or had companions of her own age?"

"No, never. Dr. Camberley did not wish it. She has really only made acquaintance with any of her contemporaries during our time abroad."

"What a very interesting experiment!" Nina drawled. "The result ought to be either a prig, or else something quite charming."

"Sylvia is not a prig." Eva laughed softly.

"You were kind enough to say you thought her lovely. I think her soul is as lovely as her face."

"You are very much prejudiced in her favour." A sudden hardness had come into the speaker's voice, her eyes had grown colder, and Eva became aware of peevish lines about her mouth, lines she had not at first noticed. "You remind me of the doting mothers who see nothing but perfection in their own children."

"Like Æsop's snipe?" Eva answered good-humouredly, wondering at the reason for Mrs. Danvers' sudden asperity. "Perhaps my judgment about Sylvia is rather biassed, but I have watched her develop from a beautiful childhood into a scarcely less beautiful girlhood, and she means so much to me."

"Oh! well, she is fortunate to have found such a friend." The words were very nearly a sneer. "Of course now she is grown up, John will be obliged to find another home for her, and no doubt this foreign trip will be the beginning of the break. She can't live in his house for ever."

"Dr. Camberley thought it would be a good thing if she saw a bigger world than Marshdale," Eva said, ignoring the end of Mrs. Danvers' sentence. "Our time in Switzerland was an immense pleasure to her, and now she is thoroughly enjoying herself here. The whole life is a total novelty to her."

"So I should imagine." Again there was a hint of a sneer in Nina's accents. "As she passed me

'in the garden just now, walking with Miss Brookes. I heard her say something quite sentimental about orange trees. She is plainly new to the South."

"To take her to beautiful places has been the greatest joy." A tender look shone in Eva's eyes. "She is so unspoilt, so devoid of the most elementary knowledge of what the word 'blasé' means: she enjoys everything with the whole-heartedness of a child."

"Very pretty, very naïve." Mrs. Danvers shrugged her shoulders slightly. "Nevertheless one has to remember she is by no means a child. She is a grown-up girl, and I daresay some people would consider her a very attractive one." As she spoke her glance involuntarily turned towards the mirror opposite the couch on which they sat, and what she saw there did not altogether satisfy her inordinate vanity. She was still a beautiful woman —yes, no one could possibly deny that fact—certainly she was still beautiful, but her face had coarsened a little; and no amount of massage had ironed out the network of crowsfeet round her eyes, or the more definite lines about her mouth. Only she herself and John Camberley knew how many times during the past years she had tried, and tried in vain, to re-establish friendly relations; and possibly the knowledge of those fruitless efforts, with the other knowledge that she was drifting on towards middle age whilst Sylvia stood on the threshold of womanhood, accounted for the asperity in her voice when she spoke of the girl. The fact that

Sylvia was John Camberley's ward, entirely altered the perspective in which she saw the girl; she was as disinclined now to acknowledge or admire her charm, as she had before been anxious to enlarge upon it; and when Eva said quickly, "Oh! everybody finds Sylvia attractive—she is so fresh, so spontaneous," Mrs. Danvers answered coldly—

"Judging from the way I once or twice heard her talk, I should be inclined to say she forgets she is no longer a child. If I may venture to say so, she is almost too spontaneous and eager."

"Do you think so?" Eva's voice was very quiet, although she deeply resented the remark; Sylvia's eager delight in the new world in which she found herself, seemed to the woman who loved her to add a new charm to the girl's gracious personality. "I can't imagine anything more natural than Sylvia's frank eagerness about all she sees; it is all so fresh and wonderful to her that she enjoys it to the very top of her bent."

"Oh! well, perhaps you are wise in allowing her to keep her illusions to the last possible moment," Nina said with a little mocking laugh. "Some day she is bound to find, as the rest of humanity has found before her, that her doll is stuffed with sawdust like all the other dolls! Each of us is obliged to make that unpleasant discovery, and I do not suppose John Camberley's ward is going to be exempt from the common lot. Even she will presently become blasé and disillusioned!"

"I wonder," Eva said slowly as she rose, feeling

that she could bear no more; "it is difficult to imagine that Sylvia could ever be either. I believe she has something in her nature which will defy all disillusionment. She is such a happy soul; and even if a time comes when she has to walk through the vale of misery, I am sure she will use it as a well. She is so intrinsically sound and wholesome, and so loving, she always wants to see the best in everything and everybody!"

"Ah, you see, I was right when I said you looked at her through rose-coloured glasses," Nina said in would-be jesting tones which lost their jest in a sneer.

"No—the glasses are not rose-coloured," Eva answered as she moved away. "I see her plainly as she is, faults and all; she is very human, she has her failings, but she has the kind of character that gets above the failings."

"Hum!" Nina ejaculated softly; but Eva, ignoring the ejaculation, added—

"I have known her for more than eight years, and I know of what fine stuff she is made. Because of her own loving heart and happy soul she turns all she touches into gold."

Nina laughed, a laugh which to her listener sounded hollow as well as harsh, strangely unlike Sylvia's laugh, which had in it a ring of irrepressible joy; and it was a relief to move across the lounge to an open window through which she had just seen the girl herself come in from the sunny garden outside.

"It is all so delicious," Sylvia exclaimed, putting

her arm through Eva's and looking eagerly into Miss Ormonde's face. "You look as if somebody had been rubbing you up the wrong way; is it that beautiful lady I saw you talking to? Has she been worrying? There is something about you that makes me think of a hen with its feathers all ruffled."

"I feel rather like a ruffled hen," Eva answered, laughing. "Don't let us talk about it. That lady, Mrs. Danvers, has an irritating effect upon me. She makes me feel just as I do when somebody cuts a cork or the bottom crust of a loaf."

"Then we will put her right out of our own thoughts," Sylvia said with gentle decision. "This place is much too lovely to think about cutting bottom crusts of loaves. Let us just talk about all the loveliness. I like the big lounge with the palm trees, and the lots of people. They make me feel gay. And when the band plays, I should like to pick up my skirts and dance as I used to do when I was little, on the lawn at Marshdale to amuse Mr. John when he had the blues."

"Did that cure the blues?"

"Yes, I think so, generally. He used to laugh such a lot at me that he forgot to be blue any more. Oh! you don't think he has got the blues again now that he is all alone, do you? He hasn't had them for ages and ages, but it is very dull for him without his tiresome little girl to tease him."

"I think he wanted his tiresome little girl to see the world thoroughly, and to enjoy herself equally thoroughly whilst she was doing it."

"Of course I am enjoying it all with every bit of me," Sylvia said in her eager voice, "and being away will make it all the lovelier at home when I go back. Only I do sometimes wish Mr. John was here too. In fact I wish it all the time. Perhaps he would not care, as much as I do, about the people and the gaiety and the band and all the fun. But he would love the olive gardens, and the walks in the mountains, and the sea that looks peacock green down there by the rocks, and like a blue and silver shield spread out in the sunlight. And how he would love the flowers, and the orange trees. Oh! I do wish he could be here to enjoy it all too."

"Perhaps he has purposely left you to feel your own feet a little," Eva answered. "He did not want to be here with you himself, because he would like you to learn to know other men and women, to make new friends. He would not like you to get into a groove."

"I like knowing new people, and everybody is so kind to me, the whole world seems friendly, and I do like making friends. But Mr. John comes first. There is not anybody here to compare to Mr. John."

CHAPTER XXI

"OH! NO"

"YOU feel the better for knowing her." It was a man who spoke, a tall good-looking man who stood by Eva's side, watching the dancers in the ballroom of the hotel. "If you won't think me impertinent for saying so to you, Miss Brentwood seems to me to carry about with her a most wonderful atmosphere of purity and peace. You feel"—he paused, as though seeking for the right words to express his thoughts—"you feel as if you always wanted to be at your best when she is anywhere about." As he spoke his eyes followed the girlish form on which Eva's eyes were also fixed, the slender girl with the dusky hair and grey starry eyes. "I suppose you know her as well as anybody knows her?" he added with a shade of embarrassment. He and Eva were sitting rather apart from the rest of those assembled in the big room, and Eva looked up at him with kindly understanding, rightly interpreting the meaning of his words.

"Yes, Mr. Maitland," she said, "I believe I do know her very well; and she is really scarcely more

than a happy child now, enjoying everything as it comes. She has had an upbringing so different from other girls, that her whole outlook is unlike theirs. She simply doesn't understand the meaning of the words 'to flirt or to coquette.' They are merely empty words to her. She takes all the attention she receives as so much friendliness and kindness; and I"—Eva hesitated—"I don't want to alter that attitude of hers. It makes her what she is."

"It makes her what she is," Denis Maitland repeated. "She is like a white lily. Not even the blackest wretch on earth would wish to smirch her whiteness." Maitland spoke more truly than he realised. Those men who clustered about Sylvia were always at their best when with her. Risqué stories died on their lips; and her wide eyes showed such evident lack of understanding, that any new acquaintance who attempted a doubtful joke or innuendo, invariably retired discomfited. Of all the men who hovered about the girl, Eva liked Denis Maitland best; and it sometimes seemed to her that Sylvia showed a certain preference for his society, though she distributed her favours with great impartiality.

"Miss Ormonde," Maitland's voice struck across her reflections, "I know it must sound absurdly old-fashioned and early Victorian, but Miss Brentwood is so utterly unlike the modern girl, that I don't believe she would think it queer if I spoke to you first. And you—you know her so well, do

you think there would be a chance for me if I asked her to marry me ? "

The strains of the waltz which the band played mingled themselves with the words in Eva's brain. Afterwards she always associated that particular waltz, "In September," with Denis Maitland's handsome features and clear grey eyes.

" If you want me to tell you quite the honest truth," she said after a pause, " I think you would only be laying yourself open to great disappointment if you asked Sylvia that question. She is not dreaming of anything of the sort. She is just young and happy, and enjoying every minute of her life here ; but she is not ready for—what you want." The pain in the eyes fixed upon her face hurt Eva's tender heart, and she put out her hand with an involuntary gesture of sympathy. " Don't look like that," she said ; " I can't bear hurting you, but it is fairer to tell you the plain truth. It would be much more cruel to raise false hopes."

" You think she doesn't know what I am driving at—what other fellows besides me are driving at ? Or do you just think that I individually have no chance with her ? "

" I am not talking from the individual point of view at all," Eva answered gently. " I mean that Miss Brentwood is not thinking about marriage at all. She looks upon men and women alike as friends who are kind to her and bring her happiness. An experience we have just had in Switzerland, has shown me quite clearly that she does not

in the least understand the meaning of love and marriage."

"An experience?" Maitland put in quickly.

"A very charming boy fell in love with her. Nothing could have been more suitable in every way; but Miss Brentwood looked upon him simply as a *bon camarade*, she had no other feeling for him whatever. She did not really grasp what it all meant to him. Her mind is still full of the old fairy tales. I believe she secretly fancies a fairy prince will one day ride into her life, and carry her off into a fairyland of their own."

"I can't aspire to be a fairy prince"—Maitland laughed rather ruefully—"but I would do all that a human man could do to make her happy."

"I know you would." There was warmth in Eva's tones; she liked this man with the grey eyes and clear-cut features. "But it would not be fair if I told you to go on and prosper. She is not ready yet for anything of the kind."

"But couldn't I make her ready?" Denis persisted. "Couldn't I open her eyes? After all, even in the fairy stories, one person had to do the waking-up process, and the Sleeping Beauty was kissed out of her sleep."

"Yes—but by just the right prince," Eva said slowly.

"And you have definitely made up your mind that I am not the right one in the case of this particular Sleeping Beauty?"

"To be quite frank with you, I don't think you

are." Eva spoke with hesitation, and as though she were weighing her words carefully before she uttered them. "I don't know that any fairy prince has yet appeared in my sleeping beauty's world, her thoughts are running on other things. She is too absorbed in the joy of mere living, and imbibing new ideas, to have room for other thoughts in her mind. Oh! I am so sorry if I have hurt you, but it is best to be brutally frank, and indeed I do not think it is you who will break through the briars and brambles to reach the place where the Princess sleeps."

At this moment their quiet corner was invaded and their talk was brought to an abrupt conclusion; but Eva was not allowed to forget the subject, for the very next morning when she was sitting reading on the lawn in front of the hotel, Mrs. Danvers strolled across the drive and sat down beside her. Close behind them a palm tree waved feathery branches against the intense blue of the sky: in the centre of the lawn was a big bed of pansies, purple and yellow and white, their velvety faces uplifted to the sunlight, and along the low fence by which the grass was surrounded, roses pink and crimson made the air fragrant as the air of an English garden in June. Eva was not altogether pleased when Nina Danvers sat down with the evident intention of entering into conversation. The beautiful woman with the soft voice gave her an instinctive feeling of distrust; "She gives me a sensation of always having to be on the defensive,"

Eva put it to herself. But when Mrs. Danvers bore down upon her now there was nothing for it but to close her book, and listen with at least a show of polite interest to soft-voiced platitudes about the beauties of the scenery, and the superiority of Southern vegetation to everything which England could produce.

"I don't know why any of us put up with England as we do," Nina said languidly, giving her pink-lined parasol a little twirl, and settling herself at a more comfortable angle in her chair. "I can't imagine why I have spent so many winters in that city of dreadful night, London, when I might have been here;" and she spread out her hands dramatically towards the palm trees and the roses.

"You do not always winter abroad?" Eva asked and Nina prefaced her answer with a sigh, one of those effective sighs which always prefaced any remark about the late Mr. Danvers.

"My dear husband and I were so much abroad," she said, "but somehow—after he left me, I felt as if I had not the heart to travel alone. And I just stayed on winter after winter in the house in town where we had been so happy." She did not consider it necessary to inform her hearer either of her efforts to re-open relations with John Camberley, or to find some other substitute for her loudly mourned husband; nor did it seem needful to own, even to herself, that her present scheme of travel had been undertaken rather with an eye to putting an end to her enforced widowhood, than from any

overwhelming desire to bask in the sunshine of the South. To pose as inconsolable appealed to her histrionic sense, and she played her part well, if not always with quite as much convincing force as she imagined. "This is one of the places my husband and I never came to in the old, happy days," she went on; "we always said to one another, 'Next time we will go to Mugny'; but next time never came, and now I am here alone."

"This is a lovely place," Eva answered, trying tactfully to lead her companion away from the train of mournful reminiscences. "I love those grey mountains running into the sea, and the white town in its setting of trees makes me think of a pearl set in emeralds. And I never realised what the roses would be like, or the avenue of plane trees with their golden crown of leaves still on them."

"You are quite poetical." Nina laughed lazily. "Yes—I like the place very much. It suits me excellently."

"Sylvia and I are delighted with it, and she——"

"Oh! she is having the time of her life, I should think." The smile left Nina's face; it grew suddenly cold, as though a chill wind had swept across it. "She is amusing herself very well."

"She is very happy, and she says people are so good to her." Mrs. Danvers laughed a short unpleasant laugh.

"She thinks people are good to her, does she? Or that is the way she puts it to you. All the men here seem absolutely idiotic about her, and she can-

not fail to be aware of the fact. Has she decided yet which moth she will choose? There are plenty fluttering about her, singeing their silly wings."

"I am sure Sylvia does not think of them at all in that way." Eva's face grew a little pink; she resented the acid note in the other woman's voice, the amused incredulity in her eyes.

"You can't want me to believe your Sylvia is posing as an *ingénue* who understands nothing; or is that what you want me to believe? It would be remarkably refreshing in times like these, when girls are much more up-to-date and advanced than their elders."

"Sylvia is not in the least up-to-date," Eva said warmly. "She has led such a simple life. Advanced ideas have not come her way, and she is very simple in all her thoughts and ways. I was really not exaggerating when I told you before that she is scarcely more than a happy child."

"The men here will soon help her to grow out of childhood; she will learn fast enough. I am watching the comedy with great interest. I sometimes feel like having a little private bet on the question of which man she will ultimately select. She has plenty of choice."

"Yes, she has plenty of choice." Having divined the jealousy that stirred in the older woman's breast against the girl who stood on the threshold of life, Eva felt a very human satisfaction in making this statement with emphasis. It was obvious, even to the meanest understanding, that the girl

with her clear eyes and simplicity of outlook, made more appeal to the men in the hotel than did the far more beautiful woman for whom the word simplicity had long ago lost its meaning; and Eva felt that her own heart rejoiced rather wickedly in Sylvia's triumphant progress. She came as near to disliking Nina Danvers as it was in her gentle nature to dislike anybody, and Nina's covert sneers against Sylvia roused her to very real anger. "Oh! yes, she has plenty of choice," she repeated, getting up from her chair with a feeling that she had come to the end of her tether of politeness, and could bear no more; "she is quite easily the most popular girl in the hotel, and her very unconsciousness of the fact adds to her charm. She has quite a number of adorers from whom to choose!" And with this parting thrust Eva moved away, leaving Nina to digest her remarks with such philosophy as she could muster. And Mrs. Danvers' face gave ample indication that her philosophy did not carry her very far!

The days drifted by pleasantly enough in the little white town circled about by grey mountains, washed by the tideless sea. Christmas came and went, the January roses were in blossom, and still Sylvia enjoyed her days with the happy, innocent enjoyment of a child. She played tennis, she danced, she went for picnics and long excursions into the mountains or by the sea shore. She wandered about the roads and olive gardens round the little town itself, and as she expressed it to Eva,

"Every single minute is like a little joyful jewel all to itself."

Denis Maitland had taken Eva's advice and had not put his fate to the test, his own observation convincing him that his monitor was right, and that Sylvia's thoughts were in no way running upon marrying or giving in marriage.

"It would be a case of 'losing it all,' if I spoke too soon," he reflected grimly as, on a certain sunny afternoon, he walked rapidly through a little frequented part of the garden; "at any rate, she doesn't seem to like anybody better than she likes me, which ought to be some small comfort. And if I wait long enough she may like me better than anybody." He laughed a little at his own pleasantry whilst he paused in the narrow path to admire the contrast between an orange tree, glossy of leaf, glossy of fruit, and a dark cypress behind it pointing a solemn finger towards the pale blue of the sky. From somewhere in the grass beside the path, there came the sweetness of violets, and beyond the slender finger of the cypress sounded the deep soft notes of a bell.

"Who was it that said, Patience was willing to wait," Maitland's thoughts ran on. "Well! I'm not willing to wait, but I'll go on doing it if there is a sporting chance that in the long run patience will be rewarded!" And he strolled on along the pathway, smiling a little at his own thoughts, pausing now and again to look at the pink anemones sown in the grass, to listen to the insistent song of a bird,

and to the deep soft notes of the bell. He had reached the loneliest part of the garden, and was still immersed in his own reflections, when a sound of voices roused him from his own absorption. The sound came from behind a clump of bushes on his left, and he realised that a man was speaking in hurried accents hoarse with passionate emotion.

"You don't understand? Well! I want to make you understand. You can't go through your life not understanding the best thing life holds, you lovely little darling with the innocent eyes."

Horrified at having overheard involuntarily what was certainly not intended for other ears, Maitland was preparing to beat a hasty retreat, when a girl's frightened, protesting tones made him pause and listen.

"No—oh! no," she exclaimed; "no—oh! no;" and there was such unmistakable terror in the accents, that Maitland, instead of following his first instincts, and moving quickly away from the spot, turned in the direction from which the sound of voices came.

"You make me mad when you look at me with those lovely innocent eyes." It was the man's voice speaking again, and his words came hoarsely and passionately. "I believe you are only playing with me, only pretending ignorance to make me lose my head more about you. But I couldn't lose it more." He spoke with a sort of breathless rush. "And you shan't elude me this time. I've

got you safely now, and you shan't pretend that you wouldn't like me to kiss you."

"No—oh! no." The protesting voice rose into a shrill cry of fear, and at the same moment Maitland pushed his way through the bushes to see Sylvia standing on the grass plot in their centre, warding off with her hands a tall man whose arms were round her, his face bent close to hers. "No—oh! no," she cried again, and Maitland, hurrying to her side, exclaimed in tones vibrating with anger—

"Leave Miss Brentwood alone, you unutterable blackguard." The man, whose arms were round the girl, dropped them instantly; but as he turned towards Maitland, his face was white with passion.

"Are you Miss Brentwood's keeper?" he said with a sneer, revealing himself to Denis as a rather recent arrival at the hotel, and furthermore as a man to whom he had taken an immediate and instinctive dislike.

"I don't know about being Miss Brentwood's keeper," he answered coolly, mastering with an effort his desire to strike a blow at the stranger's smiling, sneering face, "but I am not in the habit of standing by to see any woman insulted."

"One wonders why you were eavesdropping here at all," the other man said ironically. "Miss Brentwood and I——"

"Miss Brentwood will come back to the hotel with me," Maitland interrupted, turning to Sylvia; and seeing that she was shaking from head to foot, he drew her hand through his arm. "Possibly you

may not find the air of Mugny particularly healthy," he added significantly, as he drew the girl away; "there are plenty of other places on the Riviera."

To this remark the stranger made no reply; he was left standing in the middle of the grass plot, a picture of baffled rage and speechless indignation.

"I didn't know people could be like that," Sylvia said in a little frightened whisper, when they had left the shrubbery behind, and were walking along the paths skirting the anemone-strewn grass. "He seemed just kind and nice when I danced with him. I didn't know people could change and be so horrible." She shivered and drew nearer to Maitland, who spoke to her gently, much as he would have soothed a child.

"Try to put him out of your mind. He's an utter rotter."

"Other men aren't like that," she said with a little shake in her voice, and her grasp tightened on his arm. "Nobody ever looked at me like that before, like—like a wild animal. His eyes hurt me, and I couldn't bear him near me, I couldn't bear it." She spoke with unaccustomed vehemence, and a flame of colour swept over her face, which a moment earlier had been white with terror.

"Put the beast out of your head," Maitland answered tersely; "I should like to break his for him. Ever since he came, I've known he was an outsider, but I didn't think he was such an utterly rank outsider as this."

"Thank you for coming and helping me," Sylvia

said presently, when, her first tremors over, she had drawn her hand from his arm, and they were walking slowly across the garden. "Perhaps it was silly of me to be so frightened, only it seemed like being in the power of some dreadful savage creature from which I couldn't escape."

"I don't think it was silly of you at all." Maitland looked at the girl by his side with a sense of protecting tenderness which showed itself in his eyes. "It was only natural, only what you *would* feel, and I am thankful I was near enough to be of use to you. But don't dwell upon it all any more. Put it away like a bad dream. Things of that kind are best treated as nightmares; and fortunately there are not so many rotters about the world like this rotter who insulted you, that you need be afraid of a repetition of the insult."

"Oh, I hope not, I hope not;" Sylvia shuddered again; "it made me feel as if a snake was touching me."

"Well—snakes are not very common, thank goodness," Maitland responded, in matter-of-fact tones, designed to help her back to a normal and wholesome outlook; "they are very few and far between, so far between, that I don't suppose you will come across another in the whole course of your existence."

"I hope not," Sylvia repeated fervently, laughing a little uncertainly; "if only people would just be friendly, and not want more than friendship, it would be so much easier." She looked at him so

frankly, she uttered the words in such evident simplicity and good faith, that Maitland's heart contracted. He recognised that Eva had spoken only the plain truth when she said that there was no thought of love or of lovers in Sylvia's heart, and in those few words that the girl spoke, Maitland knew that his own doom was sealed. It was natural to him to look facts squarely in the face, and not to deceive himself with false hopes, and he looked at the present facts fairly and squarely. Some man might some day touch into life the womanhood that was slumbering now behind Sylvia's grey eyes, but it was not his touch that would work the miracle.

He owned to himself that his hopes were defeated, and he did not only own it to himself. Later on that day he came upon Eva seated upon a bench on the hillside behind the hotel, and he sat down beside her with the certainty of finding the sympathy and comprehension which Eva invariably inspired.

"You were very good to my little Sylvia," she said, turning to him quickly. "I am afraid that horrid Mr. Letchley gave her a bad fright."

"The man is an unspeakable rotter," Maitland answered, his face darkening; "but I think I showed him that he has made this place too hot to hold him. I am inclined to think he will probably find he has important business elsewhere, and decamp to-day. But I am very sorry he had a chance of frightening Miss Brentwood. He has

shaken some of her faith in humanity, and for that alone I should like to wring his neck."

"I am afraid I feel rather the same thing myself." Eva smiled. "That kind of man makes me badly want to do some neck-wringing, or something that would make them realize what pitiful reptiles they are."

"What a nice expression, 'pitiful reptiles'!" Maitland laughed. "Not that I feel much like laughing," he went on ruefully; "Miss Brentwood herself has unwittingly made me see that you were right in what you said to me about her. She is like the Sleeping Beauty—not awakened yet, and I know now for certain that who ever the Prince may be who wakes her up, it is not I who will do it. I am not the Prince who will kiss her into life—and into love!"

CHAPTER XXII

"I SHOULD LIKE TO GO HOME"

"YOU are having a very good time here, Miss Brentwood?" Nina Danvers spoke to Sylvia in her softest and most ingratiating tones, at the same time making a sign to the girl to sit down beside her upon the bench, under a group of stone pines overlooking the garden.

"Oh! yes," Sylvia answered, seating herself obediently in the place Mrs. Danvers had indicated, although she did so with a reluctance of which she was more than half ashamed. From the first day she had met Nina at Mugny she had instinctively shrunk from her, and without showing any lack of courtesy, which to her gracious nature would have been out of the question, she had, whenever it was possible, avoided Mrs. Danvers. But that lady's direct invitation could not be disregarded, and Nina smiled upon her so pleasantly that the girl was rather at a loss to account for her own shrinking distaste.

"You seem to be enjoying yourself most thoroughly," Nina went on, trying, and trying quite

successfully, to keep out of her voice the acerbity which was very decidedly tingeing her thoughts.

"I can't tell you how much I am enjoying myself," Sylvia answered eagerly, feeling that she must have been unjust in her mind towards this beautiful lady who seemed now so charming and so kind. "I never dreamt there were so many friendly people in the world. It seems as though good fairies were everywhere, helping to make me happy."

"So everybody has been nice to you, have they?" Nina looked at her with an amused smile, but she contrived to keep out of it the sneer which was as surely in her mind as the acerbity she had managed to keep out of her voice. But she had a definite end in view, and until the end was achieved she intended to pose as a kindly and interested friend. "So everybody has played the part of good fairy, have they?" she asked lightly. "You are a very lucky girl."

"Almost everybody," Sylvia answered with a shade of hesitation and a remembrance of the episode in the shrubbery; "and, indeed, I do think I am very lucky," she added hurriedly. "All my good time here will be something lovely to remember for the rest of my life, and all this"—she put out her hands towards the garden—"makes me glad." The mimosas were coming into flower, golden feathery blooms against the soft green of their leaves upon a background of vivid blue; pink stocks and velvety brown wallflowers made the air sweet with

their fragrance, pink geraniums trailed their blossoms along the balustrade amongst small bright red roses; and the breeze from the sea stirred the palms with that peculiar rustling sound which only the palm trees know.

"Then if you are so happy here, and find this place such a Paradise, I suppose you are in no hurry to go back to your guardian—to Dr. Camberley."

"Oh! but I am!" Sylvia exclaimed, suddenly feeling as though the hard eyes which seemed to compel her to look into them, were the eyes of a snake. "Sometimes I think I can't wait a minute longer before I go home and tell Mr. John about it all." Her voice was a little flurried. Mrs. Danvers' question and her own answer brought to her mind a vivid picture of the house in Draper Street, of the consulting-room with its door into the garden where she and Mr. John worked together, and of Mr. John's face with its kindly smile, and the eyes that for her held nothing but affectionate understanding. She caught her breath with a little gasp.

"That is home, you see," she said; "this is only just a beautiful change, and I enjoy it and store up every bit of it to talk over with Mr. John. Because Mr. John is home."

"That sounds very pretty and romantic, but of course you will not be able to go on living in John Camberley's house now that you are grown up." Nina smiled a significant smile, which gave Sylvia a sensation of being scorched.

"I don't understand," she faltered. "Why can't

I go on living there? I am his ward. He is my guardian; my father sent me to him, and I belong to him now."

"Belong to him?" Nina laughed, and she could not keep the touch of scorn out of her laughter. "One would imagine you were a child without any knowledge of the world." The touch of scorn crept from her laughter into her speech. "You can't go on belonging to John Camberley, as if you were a child. He is much too young to have a girl of your age living in his house. It is simply ridiculous. People would soon begin to talk."

"*Talk*?" Sylvia's innocent eyes looked full into the other woman's face. "What should they talk about? I have lived in Mr. John's house for nearly nine years now. I don't know what you mean. My father gave me to him; he is my guardian. I shall always live with him. And I am just like his little girl; I *was* only a little girl when I first went to him. How could it hurt him if I went on staying there?"

"Oh! my dear soul, please don't get so excited about it," Nina said, with another short scornful laugh. "Who ever said or thought that it would burt John if you stayed there, though from what I have heard it would be as well for him to walk circumspectly *nowadays*! But it was your reputation I was thinking about; it is *your* reputation that matters—not John's."

"I don't see how I could be better anywhere than in my own guardian's house," Sylvia said with

rising indignation, "and I don't know why you talk of Mr. John walking circumspectly *nowadays*. He always does walk circumspectly." Mrs. Danvers shrugged her shoulders.

"You are a very good partisan, my dear, if rather a prejudiced one," she answered. "I am afraid—if rumour speaks truly—John has not always walked with the circumspection one could wish. I don't want to blame the poor dear fellow; but there is no doubt he did play ducks and drakes with his own reputation and career, after he and I parted."

"After you and he parted?" Sylvia's face was flaming, her eyes were bright with anger. "I don't know what you mean, or what you have got to do with Mr. John. Why do you say horrid things about him?"

"Horrid things?" Again came the irritating shrug of the shoulders. "I did not mean to say horrid things; I was merely stating facts—facts which were known to everybody at the time they happened—when, by the way, you must have been a very tiny child."

"Whether I was a child or not when these things happened, you have no right to speak against Mr. John. He is the best man in the world."

"Do not let us get melodramatic." Nina put out her hand with a would-be soothing gesture which Sylvia entirely ignored. "You know one side of John, I know another, and the side I know, makes me better qualified than you can possibly be to understand some aspects of his life."

"I don't know what you have got to do with Mr. John," Sylvia repeated, looking rather helplessly at her tormentor, though there was still indignation shining in her eyes, and she held her head proudly.

"Once upon a time he and I had a great deal to do with each other, a very great deal," Mrs. Danvers said softly, dropping her voice into a very effective dreaminess, whilst her eyes looked out over the pansy beds and the wallflowers with an expression as dreamy as the notes of her voice. "John and I cared for each other very much—very much indeed, until—until—Fate parted us"—she sighed a most realistic sigh—"and I do not suppose he will ever care for another woman as he cared for me. He gave me his best—and a wonderful best it was."

Again she sighed, and Sylvia had no means of guessing that John's "best" had been flouted and thrown away, for the sake of another man's riches. "He gave me his best," Nina repeated, thoroughly revelling in the dramatic opportunities given her by this conversation, "and when the parting came, he—oh! my poor John, I am afraid he went dreadfully to pieces. He was utterly reckless." The expression brought back to Sylvia those same words, which, without understanding them, she had heard applied to John in the days of her childhood, and the colour left her face. She grew very white, but with admirable self-restraint she rose from the seat, and said very quietly—

"I do not think I care to discuss Mr. John with you;" and having spoken she moved away across

the garden, leaving Mrs. Danvers speechless with astonishment and wrath. Sylvia hurried on, without heeding where she was going, intent only on putting as great a distance as possible between herself and the woman with the hard eyes and mocking smile, the woman who had spoken in such a strangely possessive way of John Camberley; the woman who had once been so dear to Mr. John.

"And yet she can say things against him"—the thoughts tumbled tumultuously over one another in the girl's mind—"she says they cared for one another and that fate parted them, and yet she talks of his having gone to pieces, as though—as though——" Her thoughts were brought to an abrupt conclusion, because walking fast and unseeingly, she almost dashed into Denis Maitland who, coming through the woods behind the hotel, met her at a sharp turn in the path. Not noticing in which direction she went, she had taken one of the many paths which wound amongst the trees to the hill-top beyond, and she would have walked on to the summit but for the unexpected encounter with Maitland.

The expression on her face made him stop short, and when she made as if to brush past him without a word, he laid a restraining hand on her shoulder, struck by the set look in her eyes.

"Why, Miss Brentwood, what is the matter?" he said. "Why are you going along at express speed? Has anything happened?"

For a moment Sylvia looked at him in a sort of

bewilderment. She had to bring her mind back from a very long way off to concentrate it upon the hillside at Mugny, and the man who spoke to her so kindly. But as her glance met that of the eyes watching her, some of the tenseness left her face, the indignation in her own eyes died down a little. She liked Denis Maitland. Amongst all the men at Mugny who had made her life pleasant, this man with the quiet voice had been her chief friend, had given her a sense of reliability and steadfastness.

"I felt rather angry with somebody," she said, "somebody who said horrid things about my best friend. And I couldn't bear it when she went on talking like that, so I just got up off the seat and left her, and I had to walk away up here as fast as I could, because I wouldn't sit there and listen to what she was saying."

"Whoever said things against a friend of yours only deserves to be left alone and treated with contempt," Maitland said quickly, his eyes watching her face with a fervent admiration of which she was quite unconscious; "but don't you worry about what this person said. Most likely the horrid things were lies."

"Of course they were lies." Sylvia flamed round upon him. "At least—part of it was a lie," she ended falteringly, realising with a quick little stab of pain, that perhaps something of what that terrible lady with the hard eyes had told her was true;—perhaps Mr. John had really cared for her

very much, and had broken his heart when they said good-bye to each other.

"Don't you worry about it," Denis Maitland said cheerily. "If a woman has been cackling a lot of gossip to you, you may be sure there was a good bit of exaggeration in it. Don't you worry about it. I only wish you would let me share those worries," he added impulsively, Eva's sane counsels and his own better judgment all at once swept away, because of the expression of pain on the girl's face. "I mean—well, I'm afraid I am putting it all very badly, and not in the least as I should like to put it, but somehow when one feels and cares a lot, one can't put it into the right sort of words."

"What sort of words?" Sylvia asked, genuine bewilderment in her eyes.

"I am really trying to ask you to marry me," Maitland answered with rather a rueful smile, "but——'

"Oh! but I don't want to marry anybody," Sylvia interrupted, drawing a little away from him in the path under the pines. "I don't want to hurt you—I always seem to be hurting people nowadays, and you have been so good and kind to me, I can't bear to hurt you,"—her words were prompted by the look in his eyes—"but I couldn't marry anybody"—there was a new vehemence in her tones—"indeed I couldn't, though I am sorry, most dreadfully sorry if you mind." She put out her hand to him with a childish gesture infinitely appealing and expressive.

"I can't pretend not to mind," he answered, "because it is the real thing, and I care for you with the best of me. But I was a fool to tell you. I ought to have known I hadn't the ghost of a chance. Miss Ormonde told me as much."

"Did she?" Sylvia's voice expressed astonishment.

"Yes, she was very kind and very honest. She told me it was no use, and yet I've gone against her advice. No—don't look as though you had done me an injury. You have done no such thing. You have nothing to blame yourself for—nothing whatever."

"I hope not." Sylvia's voice was more listless than Maitland had ever heard it. "I do hope not. I have never wanted to hurt anything or anybody in all my life. But now I seem to be always hurting people."

"It is not your fault that I've been hurt," Maitland protested earnestly. "Nobody is to blame but myself. You have never led me on, never played fast and loose; never coquetted, or done any of the things other women look upon as quite the right things to do. You have simply been yourself, and I care for you because you are yourself. But you can't care in the same way for me?" He put the words in the form of a question, though he recognised the hopelessness of his quest.

"I am afraid I cannot care in the way you mean," she said very simply, and as though it had suddenly and unexpectedly been revealed to her what "that

way" meant. "I am so sorry, but indeed I do not want to marry anybody."

"I ought to have taken Miss Ormonde's advice and made up my mind once and for all that I am not the Prince," Denis answered with a whimsical smile, and an attempt to speak lightly.

"The Prince?" Sylvia's brows drew together.

"Some day a Prince will awaken the Sleeping Beauty," he said, and for an instant his hand rested again upon her shoulder, "but I am not the prince to do it!"

Back into Sylvia's mind there crept a picture out of her childhood, the long-ago day when she and Mr. John had stood in his neglected garden, looking at the bed overgrown with grass and weeds. On that day they had talked, he and she, of a rose bush they would plant in the middle of the overgrown bed, and they had called it the Sleeping Beauty. The little vision faded, but her guardian's face did not fade with the rest of the picture; and that evening when she told Eva of Denis Maitland's proposal, she wound up by saying—

"And please may we soon go home? Everything is lovely here, and I have had such a beautiful time, but I should like to go home now. Everybody has been so good to me, and I like my new friends ever so much, but there is nobody in all the world like Mr. John, and I want to go home to him."

CHAPTER XXIII

WHAT BEATRICE SAW

ALTHOUGH she had told Eva about part of her conversation with Denis Maitland, the part which concerned his offer of marriage, Sylvia did not mention the train of circumstances which had led up to that offer, nor her own previous talk with Mrs. Danvers. She would have found it difficult to explain, even to her own soul, why she could not repeat that lady's remark about Mr. John. But she found it impossible to speak of them, and the very remembrance of the innuendos about her guardian, to which Mrs. Danvers had given utterance, roused a storm of resentment within the girl, of which she was half surprised, half ashamed.

"Even if he did go to pieces when he was unhappy, it was not right of her to go on saying it to me," the indignant thought ran through her mind. "I should think, if she cared about him as much as she said, she would have wanted to hide from everybody that he had gone to pieces at all! She wouldn't want to tell anybody. I think her caring must have been a very funny kind, and I wonder how much Mr. John cared for her, and whether

he still remembers?" These thoughts ran often through Sylvia's brain during the journey back to England, and perhaps they were indications of the fact that she was a very human little person, and not entirely above some of the foibles and failings of humanity. But although she had not told Miss Ormonde of her encounter with Nina Danvers, Eva was conscious of some indefinable change in her charge, a change for which she could not account. Some of Sylvia's natural serenity seemed to have deserted her; she seemed to be possessed by a new strange restlessness, and her eyes had lost some of their eager gladness.

"And yet I cannot account for it," Eva said slowly to her sister-in-law, in whose house she and Sylvia were staying before continuing their journey to Marshdale. "Sylvia was so radiantly happy all the time we were in Switzerland, and in the Riviera too. She enjoyed everything in the most heart-whole, delightful way. It was a pleasure to see her, a pleasure to be with her."

"Amongst all the numerous men who, as you tell me, hovered about her, was there one, do you think, who has left his mark?" Beatrice asked. The two women were sitting together in Mrs. Noel Ormonde's charming boudoir, where the smell of the logs burning in the grate mingled deliciously with the scent of Roman hyacinths in pots upon the bookcase, and a great bowl of deep purple violets standing in the centre of the table. "Your Sylvia is not pining for somebody who has caught and

captured that lovely glad heart of hers?" Eva smiled at the phrase. It so entirely expressed her own admiration of the girl she had watched grow up from a happy-natured child, into a no less happy-natured woman.

"It is quite impossible to imagine Sylvia pining for any of the men who devoted themselves to her," she said. "The truth of the matter is, they frankly worried her, directly they showed signs of emerging from the chrysalis—good comrade, into the butterfly—lover. She cordially disliked any hint of love-making, and could not in the least understand why the unfortunate men should not go on being as content with mere friendship as she was herself. Oh! no, she is not pining for anybody we have left behind in the South."

"Something or some one has made a difference in her." Beatrice leant back in her chair, and looked musingly at the flames leaping about the logs. "There is a new expression in her eyes. She seems to me to have acquired some knowledge which she had not got before."

"She has learnt a good deal about various sorts of people." Eva bent forward, and held her hands out to the blaze. "She had lived such a hermit's life in Marshdale, that the mere fact of coming in contact with so many fresh types of men and women, must have had a profound effect upon her."

"Yes, but it is something more than that, something that has gone deeper." Beatrice's dark eyes left their contemplation of the leaping flames, and

fixed themselves dreamily upon Eva's face. "I don't deny that all the friends and acquaintances she has made, have played their parts in developing her, in opening her eyes. But I am inclined to think some element of self-revelation has crept in somewhere. I can't quite put into words what I mean, but it seems to me she has learnt to know some side of herself, of her own nature, which she did not know before."

"What observant eyes you have!" Eva looked into Beatrice's beautiful quiet face and smiled. "How have you contrived to find out so much about Sylvia in so short a time?"

"She interests me. She has interested me from the first moment I saw her, when she came into the Meadow House with her guardian. She struck me then as being so alive, so happy, so unusually restful for such a young girl, and now she has lost some of that restful quality. I don't believe it is permanently gone, but for the time she has lost it, and I am wondering why."

"She will probably get it all back, when she is at home again in the house in Draper Street with Dr. Camberley," Eva answered.

"And she is going to settle down into the same old life as before?" Beatrice's eyes looked at Eva more searchingly than the younger woman knew, for her own gaze was turned now towards the logs and the leaping flames.

"I think so; oh yes, I think so—I hope so." Eva spoke quickly. "It is her life. She has

deliberately chosen to come back to it, when she might have married and gone into a totally new and different world."

"Yes. It seems as though she had, as you say, deliberately chosen the quiet Marshdale existence, after seeing what the outside world was like. Dr. Camberley was very wise in insisting that she should know there was something bigger than the Marshdale duck pond, a wider ocean beyond. It must have cost him a great deal to let her go. His house with Sylvia, and his house without her, must be two very different places. How very glad he will be to welcome her back!"

"Yes." Eva felt incapable of uttering more than the monosyllable. She was ashamed of herself, for the quick little pain that shot through her, with a fleeting vision of what might have happened ultimately, supposing that Sylvia had accepted, instead of rejecting, either of the men who had tried so hard to win her love. The swift thought would not be wholly gainsaid. A lonely John Camberley, a John Camberley out of whose house Sylvia had gone for ever, might have turned for comfort to Sylvia's close friend; and then—— She pulled herself up short, mentally scolding herself for these unprofitable reflections, and looking at her sister-in-law with a smile which, as Beatrice inwardly expressed it, made her want to howl. "Sylvia will get a royal welcome from her guardian and from Mrs. Day the housekeeper, and from dear old Mr. Symonds," Eva said. "I don't wish to seem

poetical or sentimental, but she really is the sunshine of those three lives."

"I was going to propose that before she goes home she should stay a little while with us, and so see something of London," Mrs. Ormonde said, after a pause; "it would be a pleasure to me to take her about, she is so fresh and unspoiled."

"What a kind thought! And if Sylvia herself would like it, I am sure Dr. Camberley would allow her to stay on with you. I *must* get home. My various little good works are poking up their heads, and asking how much longer I mean to neglect them: and all my deputies and locum tenens are beginning to rebel, and decline to do locum any longer. So that I must go home, but do ask Sylvia to stay. She really is a delicious person to take anywhere or show anything to. For her the word blasé has no meaning."

The suggested invitation was given to Sylvia that evening, when before dinner she and her hostess were the first two of the household to come into the drawing-room. Sylvia admired Beatrice with all the unstinted admiration which a girl will sometimes bestow upon an older woman; and her eyes brightened when they fell upon Mrs. Ormonde standing beside the fire; the light from the electric lamps gleaming in her dark hair in which a diamond aigrette sparkled—and shining softly upon the rose-coloured velvet of her gown. The colour harmonised with the delicate tints of her face, and deepened the depths of her eyes; and Sylvia felt,

as she had often felt before, that she did not know which was most adorable, Beatrice's dignified grace, the charm of her lovely face, or the clear soft voice that had such a musical quality. She was quite unconscious of her own charming appearance in a pale grey gown with a big pink rose at her waist, but Mrs. Ormonde glanced at her approvingly, saying—

"You have chosen just the colours that suit you best. I always wished I had had a daughter as well as a son. It would have been such a pleasure to choose pretty clothes for a daughter. Boys' garments are so totally wanting in romance!"

"Miss Ormonde chose this frock for me. She likes me in grey or in white. She takes such a lot of trouble about my frocks, she is so good to me;" and Sylvia's face lighted up as it always did when she spoke of those she loved.

"Eva will miss you when she hands you back to your guardian," Beatrice said, as the girl seated herself upon the fender stool. "I believe she has enjoyed showing you the world, as much as you have enjoyed seeing it."

"She has been so good to me," Sylvia repeated, and as the glow of the fire fell upon her face, Beatrice was again struck by its great charm. "I don't think many girls have such splendid friends as I have," the girl added simply. "Sometimes I do wish Dad could just come and see how lucky I've been. He always said the people were so blest

who had a lot of sunshine in their lives, and my life seems to be full of sunshine."

"You carry a great deal of sunshine about with you," Beatrice said kindly. "My own theory is that sunny-natured people attract sunshine to themselves, and you are such a sunny little being." Sylvia flushed with pleasure.

"Am I? You can't think how glad I am when you call me that. One of the things Daddy most often said to me was 'Spread sunshine all about you. Carry a sunny atmosphere.' And if I do as he said it is because everybody is so good to me. I have found so much love everywhere, and the world is such a good place."

"Noel and I want you to stay with us for a little while before you go home. We could show you something of London."

"Oh! how good of you, how very good. But"—Sylvia paused, with an evident wish not to be discourteous—"but would it be quite the same to you if I came to you another time, if it suited you? I do want to go home now, and tell Mr. John about everything. I am afraid perhaps he would be sorry if I did not go now. May I come to you later?"

"Why, of course! You are glad to be going back to Marshdale?"

"Yes, ever so glad to be going home, and to be going to see Mr. John again." Beatrice wondered why all at once a shadow crossed the bright young face, why the expression upon which she had commented to Eva suddenly looked out of the girl's

eyes. "Only——" Sylvia went on, with a hesitation for which there seemed no accountable cause—"only—sometimes I have wondered lately whether I ought to stay altogether at Marshdale, and be—and be a kind of burden to my guardian."

"What makes you imagine you are a burden?" The quick intuition of the older woman realised that underneath the girl's words there lurked something more than their mere surface meaning. She could not put her own intuition into definite form, only—as she would have worded it in her own mind—she "knew" that Sylvia's speech cloaked some real trouble or difficulty.

"I—I thought perhaps it might be a worry to him to have a great grown-up ward to look after," Sylvia said, still with that curious hesitation of manner. "You see I am not a little girl any more." The wistfulness in her voice, the shadow in her eyes touched all the motherly chords in Beatrice's heart, and her native shrewdness made her jump to a conclusion not far removed from the truth.

"It is exactly what I said to Eva," she reflected, "some new knowledge has come to the child. Either she is realising herself in some fresh way, or she has eaten of the fruit of the tree where good and evil fruit is mixed so indiscriminately." Aloud she said: "I daresay your travels have taught you that you are not a child any more: and the people you met brought home to you that you are grown up."

"One person I met brought it home to me,"

Sylvia exclaimed with a hint of indignation in her voice which surprised her listener; "it was a Mrs. Danvers. We met her at Mugny. And she—well, she talked to me a little," Sylvia ended rather lamely, pulling herself up as though she were afraid of saying too much.

"Mrs. Danvers? You know this was Mrs. Danvers' house? My husband and I took the remainder of the lease. She was anxious to get into new surroundings."

"Is she a friend of yours?" Beatrice noted the touch of questioning surprise in the words.

"Oh! no, I have only seen her two or three times, just to discuss business arrangements. My husband had seen her before. Perhaps you know that Mr. Danvers died in the Ormondes' house at Marshdale."

Back into Sylvia's mind there came again the remembrance of that long-ago day, when the beautiful woman in her black draperies had come into the garden of John Camberley's house, and side by side with that picture, rose the thought of the same woman, who, under the palm trees in the Mugny garden, had looked at her with hard, unfriendly eyes.

"Yes—I did know about Mr. Danvers, though. I had forgotten it," she said, "and Mrs. Danvers is an old friend of Mr. John. She made me see that I really am grown up." The apparently irrelevant sentences fixed themselves together with a certain coherence in Mrs. Ormonde's shrewd brain. She

felt that she was groping her way to daylight through the darkness.

"I can't quite put my finger on the spot," she said later in the evening to Eva. "Our conversation was interrupted at that psychological moment, but I have a very decided notion that Mrs. Danvers is somehow at the bottom of the change both you and I notice in your pretty Sylvia!"

"Mrs. Danvers?" Eva looked mystified. "But she and Sylvia hardly came in contact with one another at all, and why should Sylvia be affected by her one way or the other?"

"I don't know, and as I tell you I can't quite put my finger on the spot, though I am sure the spot is there. But your Sylvia has her reticences. With all that frankness which is one of her great charms, she has also a certain reticence. And I should not be altogether surprised if her talk with Mrs. Danvers wasn't hidden away in the depths of that reticence. I am inclined to think that very odious woman said something to Sylvia, which gave the dear girl a shock, or an unpleasant surprise: and I also doubt whether she will tell either you or me what the odious woman did say.

"What makes you think all these things? You are like some gentle sort of witch; quite an up-to-date beautiful one, not ugly, or hunchbacked, and wicked."

"Oh! my dear, I can't explain my witch ways." Beatrice laughed. "I sometimes do get instincts about people and things, and this instinct came to

me about Sylvia and Mrs. Danvers. By the way Sylvia said Dr. Camberley and Mrs. Danvers were old friends. Is that so, I wonder. And if it is, has Mrs. Danvers been drawing upon her imagination, to make Dr. Camberley's ward believe fairy tales invented for her own ends ? "

" I believe Mrs. Danvers was a friend of Dr. Camberley's years ago, but why should she invent fairy tales now ? I don't understand," Eva asked.

" Neither do I—altogether," her sister-in-law replied, " only I have a glimmering idea that Mrs. Danvers has in some way played the part of serpent in Sylvia's Eden, and some day perhaps we shall find out exactly how she has done it—and why ! "

CHAPTER XXIV

EVA'S ADVICE

THERE is a particular April afternoon which will always be stamped vividly upon Eva Ormonde's memory; and whenever in her later years the memory of it comes back to her, there will come back as well the thought of the fragrances from the garden that came drifting in at the open window, carrying with them a sense of the new life that was beginning afresh all over the world. The sharpness had gone out of the wind. The day was soft and balmy, and the air was full of the scent of wallflowers from the great bed upon the lawn, where bees hummed drowsily amongst the brown and golden flowers. Looking across the garden from her place by the writing-table, Eva could see a vista of blossoming pear trees, a cloud of snowy white against a background of pale green where the chestnut trees were budding, and of pale brown where the birches were still leafless, showing only a delicate tracery of boughs. Upon a hawthorn bush where the leaves were unfolding in the sunlight, a blackbird sat and fluted his song of coming summer, and in the meadow beyond the hedge the larks rose, singing towards the pale April sky.

As she heard the clear, triumphant notes, Eva smiled, the sense of spring stirred within her and thrilled along her pulses: and when the door of the drawing-room opened, and the parlourmaid announced Dr. Camberley, her heart gave a sudden soft leap. On the day some few weeks ago, when she and Sylvia had arrived at Marshdale after their sojourn abroad, John had met them at the station; and he had there thanked her warmly for her care of his ward. But since that day she had not seen him, and a visit from him was such an unusual event, that the soft leap of her heart was not altogether without justification. A visit from John, unaccompanied by Sylvia, was unprecedented: never before had he come to see her alone. Just for one fleeting second it crossed her mind to wonder whether he could really have come to see her for her own sake. But the wonder lasted no longer than that fleeting second. One glance into her visitor's face made it plain to her that it was not any particular wish for her society which had brought him to the Meadow House, and his manner was not the manner of one who had come at friendship's bidding, or for pleasant social distraction. When he had met her and Sylvia at the station, Eva had been struck with the look of almost radiant contentment which looked out of his eyes. But now their expression was troubled, all the radiant contentment was gone. There was a certain absent-mindedness about his air, and it was perfectly obvious that his thoughts were intent upon some definite purpose, which had

brought him. Indeed he did not attempt to enter into preliminary conversation, or to lead up to his purpose by any conventional byways, but plunged straight into the subject which was evidently absorbing his mind.

"Will you help me?" he said abruptly, after shaking hands with her. "I have come to ask for your help."

"Of course I will do anything I can." Eva seated herself on the sofa that stood at right angles to the window, the sofa that was upholstered in cretonne of soft dim colours which helped to give the room its air of old-fashioned charm. But John did not sit down; he moved restlessly towards the window, and stood leaning against it.

"I am rather worried," he said, still speaking abruptly, "and because I don't quite know what to make of things, or what is wisest to do, I have come to inflict my worries upon you."

"I shall be glad if I can help," Eva answered in her gentle voice. The quietness in her eyes seemed to have a soothing effect upon the doctor. "What is the worry?"

"It is about Sylvia." John turned his head aside for a moment, and looked out over the bed of wallflowers, to the forget-me-nots that shone like turquoises in the grass, and the blossoming pear tree with its brown lacework boughs. "She has not seemed like herself since she came home. She——" He paused as if not quite certain how to express himself. "She has lost some

of her brightness. I don't mean to say that she did not enjoy herself abroad." He was answering the look in Eva's eyes, not any spoken words. "She has been full of enthusiasm and delight about everything she saw and did, but——" Again he paused. "She is not like herself. I do not know how to explain it in any other way. She is not like herself."

"In what way?" Eva asked, and John's eyes turned from their contemplation of the garden and looked straight at her as he answered—

"She is sometimes oddly distrait, which is very unlike her. And her eyes have lost some of their old gladness. It is as though a shadow had dropped over them."

"Do you mean that she is not happy?"

"I don't know," John spoke thoughtfully; "perhaps I could not exactly say she is unhappy, and yet she has certainly lost some of her old light-heartedness. She is not quite the same Sylvia who went away."

"She was very anxious to come home," Eva said; "it was by her express wish that we started for England when we did. I am sure——"

"She has been talking about going away from here, and getting work to do," John interrupted, scarcely hearing Eva's words; "but why should she go away and work? There is no reason why she should work. And how could I let her go?"

As he said those last words, the pain in his voice, the expression in his face, told Eva a great deal

more than her visitor was conscious of showing her and her own heart contracted with a little stab of suffering. Everything he said and did made it so very plain to her that John Camberley's whole heart was wrapped up in the girl who had first gone to him as a little lonely child. With every word he uttered his listener's conviction became more and more of a certainty—Sylvia meant something to her guardian that nobody else could ever mean; Sylvia indeed had become for him no longer his child ward to whom he was to take the place of father—but the one woman in his world!

And with that conviction came another, no less certain, no less clearly defined. And it was as overwhelming as it was clearly defined, for Eva knew in that moment's conviction, that it was her hand which must point out to John the place where his own happiness lay; her hand which must roll away the veil that lay between Sylvia's soul, and the soul of the man who loved her. The thoughts went through her mind in those few flashing seconds, whilst her glance, like John's, wandered over the beds of wallflowers and the turquoise forget-me-nots, to the pear tree and the delicate tracery of the birch boughs; and with those thoughts there came another. It was a rebellious thought, and she recognised it as such. And yet—it came, and for a moment it stayed, bringing with it again that little stab of pain.

Surely she, a mature woman with a knowledge of life, a knowledge of love—surely she would have had the power to give more happiness to John

Camberley, than could possibly come to him from a girl who had still scarcely crossed the stream where womanhood and childhood meet? Between John and Sylvia there stretched the wide gulf of years. Between John and herself there was no wide gulf to bridge; he and she stood on the same plane of life, looking at things from the same vantage ground. How would a girl like Sylvia, a girl who was still scarcely more than a child, fill a man's life and satisfy all his needs? Whilst she—whilst she—— A tiny sense of bitterness stirred within her, but it lasted only for a moment, and then the sweet wholesomeness of her nature thrust it resolutely away. She looked away from the garden, and as John, surprised by her long silence, turned towards her, her eyes met his frankly, and he thought again, as he had thought when he first saw her years before, that he had never seen eyes more restful, more motherly, more serene.

"Sylvia wants to go away and find work?" she questioned; "but why should she wish to do such a thing? What reason does she give you?"

"She gives me no reason that seems in the least satisfactory or convincing," John answered. "I have come to you hoping to get some explanation, because I confess Sylvia herself puzzles me. Ever since she came back, she has given me an impression of being restless and worried. I hardly like to use the word 'unhappy,' that sounds an exaggeration. And yet I should almost be inclined to use that word."

"Unhappy? Sylvia unhappy?" Eva leant forward impetuously; "it is impossible to associate unhappiness with her."

"So I should have thought before she went away. But now—she is different."

"Perhaps she feels just a little unsettled," Eva said reassuringly; "sometimes coming back to one's old ways and old routine is a little unsettling after travelling for months as we have been doing."

"I thought of that solution," John answered, "but I feel it goes deeper than that. She has been at home long enough now to have got over the first unsettled feeling. But instead of getting over it, she seems to me to grow more and more restless. And if it were not absurd to dream of such a state of things, I should say she was not at ease with me. And that is ridiculous," he laughed rather cheerlessly; "could anything be more ridiculous than to suppose that Sylvia should not be at ease with *me*? She and I have always been such perfect friends. We have always understood each other so absolutely." Again there came a little twinge of pain in Eva's heart, but no pain showed in her eyes. They were brave and serene as ever.

"And you mean to imply that she suggests going away from here because she is not at ease with you? Has she given no definite reason for wanting to go away?" Eva repeated the question, and John shook his head.

"I could not really understand her," he said, a bewildered expression in his eyes. "I don't mean

to say that her wish to go, and my impression that she is no longer at ease with me, are connected; but the coincidence between the two certainly struck me. To tell you the honest truth, Miss Ormonde, I really could not make out what Sylvia did mean."

"Why not?" Eva asked very gently.

"Because she is not naturally incoherent or indefinite, but about this she has been both. She spoke with an odd vagueness. She said she was getting too old to be living idly at Marshdale. Too old? Why too old?" he burst out with sudden vehemence. "I don't know what she means by too old. How can she be too old to stay quietly at home? She says she ought to go out and work as other girls work. But"—he looked at Eva with the helplessness of a man who feels himself puzzled by a woman's problem which is out of his depth—"but why should she go and work? There is no need for her to do anything of the kind. Why should she go away? Unless"—he hesitated—"unless amongst all the men you met whilst you were abroad, there is one who is more to her than the others, and this could account for her restlessness?"

"No, oh! no——" Eva began, but John ignored the quickly uttered negatives.

"I thought perhaps she was learning to care for some one, and that things were not working smoothly, or that there was a little hitch. And I was sure you would know something about what had hap-

pened. You would be able to put me on the right track. Or if you didn't know, your womanly instincts would guide you aright about it. A man is such a hopeless fool about things like this."

"Yes," Eva reflected with a little grim humour, "a man certainly is a hopeless fool about these things." But aloud she only said emphatically: "Sylvia is not worrying about any man we met abroad. She looked upon them all merely as friendly acquaintances, nothing more." Eva spoke with all the greater emphasis because the look in John's eyes hurt her. "Sylvia was friendly and charming to the men we met, and some of them would have liked to ask for more than friendship from her; but on her side there was nothing more than friendship, nothing at all."

"Then"—the puzzled look on Camberley's face deepened, though Eva saw and understood the irrepressible relief that sprang into his eyes—"then I can only fall back on the theory that she is still unsettled after her travels. Only—it is not like Sylvia to be unsettled. She has such a glad, peaceful nature."

"Such a glad, peaceful nature." The words lingered in Eva's mind. They so accurately described the girl of whom they were spoken.

"Of course she may be tired of my dull old house and me," John went on, "though it does not seem like Sylvia to get tired of her friends. And yet I cannot deny the fact that she is very young, and that to her I must seem just an old fogey. It

would not be at all strange if she did find my house dull."

Whilst he was talking, some words spoken in a girlish voice rang over and over again in Eva's brain.

"There is nobody in the world like Mr. John, and please may we go home to him?" And with the remembrance of those words, there came back to her, too, the memory of what Beatrice had said about Mrs. Danvers. At the time, she had looked upon her sister-in-law as rather fanciful and imaginative. Now the conviction slowly forced itself upon her, that perhaps Beatrice's surmise after all had been right. Perhaps the beautiful woman with the hard eyes had really been more of a serpent than she had ever guessed. Beatrice with her knowledge of the world, and her intuitive sympathy, had perhaps been more far-sighted about Sylvia than she herself had been, dearly as she loved the girl. But it was the echo of Sylvia's words in her heart that made her rise impulsively to her feet, and go to John's side, forgetting everything but the desire to help the man and the girl she loved. And she laid a hand on John's arm, speaking quickly and eagerly.

"Don't you think you are just a wee bit dense," she said; and at his look of surprise, a smile came into her soft eyes and on to her lips; "yes, I really mean it, and it sounds very rude, put in such a crude way. But don't you really think you are a little dense?"

"Why dense?" John asked, rising to his feet too, and standing by Eva's side looking at her with bewilderment still in his eyes. "What could I do or say to help matters out? Why do you call me dense?"

"Because you are." Eva laughed outright now, a low, amused laugh. "Sylvia has never looked upon you as an old fogey, and she is never likely to do anything of the kind. Go straight home and ask Sylvia two or three things. Ask her what Mrs. Danvers and she talked about in the garden at Mugny—and——"

"Mrs. Danvers?" John interrupted, an angry look shooting into his eyes. "You don't mean to say that Sylvia was ever near that woman?"

"We were in the same hotel at Mugny, and she talked to Sylvia one day—but I know nothing about the conversation. Ask Sylvia to tell you about it. That is one thing. And for the other things"—Eva's smile shone out again,—"ask her whether she looks upon you as an old fogey, and what she thinks about you. Ask her whether she really wants to go away from you. Ask her all these things, and I think you will find—well, I will leave you to see for yourself what you will find—only don't be dense any more!"

And the sudden radiant look that flashed into John Camberley's eyes was Eva's best and sweetest reward.

CHAPTER XXV

THE SLEEPING BEAUTY

IN John Camberley's garden a blackbird sat and whistled of coming summer and of love and joy. He sat upon the pear tree just at the top of the lawn, and the white blossoms from the tree dropped at Sylvia's feet, as she sat on the terrace above the lawn, listening to the triumphant song which seemed to hold in it all the glory of the spring that had already come, of the summer that was yet to be. And although the blackbird's clear, fluting voice made her glad, it gave her at the same time a queer little unaccountable heartache. Sometimes she almost longed to cry out to the bird to be silent: and sometimes she wanted to beg him to sing on and on until his very singing should still the ache at her heart. From the bench where she sat upon the terrace, she looked across the lawn—where, just as in Eva's garden, there were great beds of wallflowers and starry forget-me-nots—to the borders under the wall, and here tulips, rose-coloured and golden, basked in the sunshine. And as she sat looking at the velvet softness of the lawn, the well-kept beds, the snowy loveliness of the pear

tree, there floated into her mind a remembrance of the garden as it had been when she first saw it nine years before. Child though she was when she came to Draper Street, she had been greatly impressed by the dreary neglect of both garden and house; and her first vivid impression of the neglected garden came back to her now. The rank grass, the beds overgrown with weeds, the shrubs straggling wildly at their own sweet will; the grass-covered paths that had seemed scarcely more than little tracks across a jungle; the briars and brambles which had pushed themselves everywhere—all these Sylvia saw again, a picture out of the past, a picture which offered a strange contrast to the gracious, well-kept garden of to-day. Close at hand was the bed which she had fancifully christened the place of the Sleeping Beauty. She smiled a little over the remembrance of the old fanciful name, and over the memory of the amount of hard work which she and Mr. John had given to clearing away the weeds from that particular bed. Now it was ablaze with crimson tulips under the rose trees, which by-and-by would be fragrant with blossoms, orange and white, and one special tree in the centre with royal red flowers. Yes! garden and house had lost their former air of neglect and desolation. Only yesterday when Mr. Symonds came to see her, he had commented on the beauty of the garden, the charm of the quaint old-world house. He had spoken quite truly,—the house was charming, the garden was a garden of delight.

Everything ought to be so happy, so peaceful in the home to which she had longed to return, the home she loved. Only—— Here her thoughts came to a standstill, pulled up short as it were by the difficulty of answering her own question. Only—what? Why was she dimly conscious that the peace and happiness she instinctively felt ought to fill the old house, were in some incomprehensible way lacking? Why was she aware of an atmosphere of unrest, of a jarring note, of something new, unaccountable, strange? She could not put her own feelings into words, her very thoughts were incoherent and ill-defined. She did not understand herself; she only realised that she felt restless, troubled, ill at ease, no longer the happy, eager child she had been when she and Miss Ormonde went away together.

"Perhaps I ought never to have gone," she reflected; "perhaps being so long away has made me seem different now, and has made Mr. John feel different about me. I couldn't ever feel different about him," her thoughts ran on wistfully, "but he doesn't seem the same."

No, there was no doubt about it, Mr. John did not seem the same. In his manner there was a constraint which had never been there before. He no longer looked into her face with his old, kind smile: he seemed to avoid her eyes. In fact, she was almost certain he avoided her company as well. The perfect freedom which had always existed between them, existed no longer. In spite of his unfailing kindness and courtesy, Sylvia felt that

John had in some indefinable way changed. A barrier had risen between them; an invisible, intangible barrier, and the girl felt herself powerless to batter it down.

"I believe it must be true what she said to me," her thoughts ran on; "that lady with the hard eyes said it very decidedly and I believe it is true. She said Mr. John had always cared for her, and would never leave off caring, and I think it must be true what she said. Perhaps I am in their way. She told me I could not go on living here, and I expect she said that, because she knew if I was here, Mr. John would not ask her to come and be his wife. But if I was not here any more—if I was not in the way, then he would ask her, and he would be happy with her, if he has always cared for her." Again her thoughts came to a standstill, and though her eyes were fixed on the snowy glory of the pear tree, and the crimson tulips visible between its boughs, she saw instead, the woman in trailing black who had come across the lawn nine years before. Her childish eyes of long ago had noted the visitor's beauty, but they had noted as well the hardness which even then had been visible in Nina Danvers' face. And now as the broken thread of her thoughts was picked up again, she whispered under her breath—

"She said they had always cared for each other—he and she—but she didn't look as if she could make him happy—really she didn't."

She looked up at the blackbird who for the mo-

ment had stopped singing and was surveying her with bright, inquisitive eyes. "No, I don't think she would make him happy. Her eyes had no love in them, and I don't believe she would ever understand all his little ways."

The blackbird broke into a fresh burst of song, and at the same instant a step upon the gravel path aroused Sylvia from her reverie, and as her eyes met John's eyes that looked full into hers, a flame of colour flashed across her face. Her guardian came towards her very quietly, but there was a boyish eagerness in his manner, and as he sat down upon the seat beside her, he began to speak with almost boyish impulsiveness.

"Sylvia," he said abruptly, "I have been told to come straight home and ask you two or three questions."

"Ask me two or three questions? Why?" Sylvia's voice faltered a little; the light in John's eyes disconcerted her, the smile that hovered over his lips made her heart beat in queer little jerks, and she had a most absurd wish to get up and run away. "What questions have you been told to ask me?"

"The first is this." John spoke very slowly, never taking his eyes from her face, on which the colour came and went softly. "Tell me what Mrs. Danvers talked to you about when you sat with her in the garden at Mugny?"

"Oh!" Sylvia exclaimed under her breath, lifting her downcast face and looking at his with

startled eyes, "why do you want to know? I—don't think I can tell you," and her tone and glance were distressed. "She—she just talked about things."

"Yes—but what things?" John's voice was very gentle. "Try to tell me what Mrs. Danvers said to you."

"It is very difficult to tell you." Sylvia spoke with some hesitation. "She—talked partly about—you."

"About me?" John's brow darkened. "What on earth did she find to say about me?"

"She told me——" Sylvia paused, and her hands clasped and unclasped themselves nervously in her lap. "She told me about—how much you and she had cared for each other—and——"

"*What?*" John almost shouted the interruption, and he stared at Sylvia as though she were talking in an unknown tongue.

"She told me about how you and she had cared for each other," Sylvia repeated, with a falter in her voice, "and about how you could never care for anybody else as you did for her, and——" But again her words were interrupted, for at that moment John threw back his head and laughed—a laugh of intense amusement in which there was no trace of bitterness.

"She told you that, did she?" He looked into the girl's puzzled face, his eyes brimming over with mirth. "Well, well, there is no getting upsides with a woman of her calibre. I did care for

her"—his voice grew suddenly serious—"I cared for her so much that I nearly made a shipwreck of my life when she threw me over."

"Threw you over?" Sylvia's eyes opened wide. "She said you were obliged to part, and she talked quite sadly, as if it had been a parting that could not be helped."

"It could very well have been helped if she had chosen to help it," John said grimly. "She threw me over—that is the plain English of it, and I took the thing pretty hard. More fool I! If I had had half the sense I have since with difficulty acquired, I should have known that she did me the greatest service in the world when she broke off our engagement." His tones were tinged with sarcasm, but the sarcasm dropped away from him almost instantaneously. "So she told you very old fairy tales," he went on briskly; "but you know now, don't you, that as far as the present is concerned, they are fairy tales—nothing more?"

"Yes—if you say so, of course I know it." Sylvia's eyes, shining with all their childish faith in him, looked frankly into his.

"It makes me ashamed to have to confess it now, but after she chose a rich man instead of me, I made a ghastly hash of my work and my life," John said slowly, "and it has taken me years to find out that she was not worth all that she cost me."

"She said you went to pieces," Sylvia burst out indignantly, and as though she could not repress the words, but John answered gravely—

"She was about right. I did go to pieces. It was a case of eating husks with the swine; and now"—he put out his hand with a little fierce gesture—"now I wish to God I hadn't."

For a few minutes there was silence, whilst John looked out over the flowering garden, his face very set and sad, and Sylvia watched him with eyes that held a strange womanly tenderness.

"Don't think back about it all," she said quaintly, after those few moments of silence, "it is all over and done with. Let's put it all away, and begin again." At her words the gloom left John's face, he turned back to her with a smile.

"What was it your father used to call you?" he said—"his darling comfort. He could not have found a name that suited you better—a darling comfort." He repeated the phrase musingly, and in his eyes there was a light which set Sylvia's pulses throbbing, and made her feel in an undecided way that she was not quite sure whether she most wanted to laugh or to cry.

"And why do you suppose Mrs. Danvers gave you all those interesting reminiscences about herself and me?" John asked; "Where did you come in?"

"I don't quite know; I don't quite understand." Sylvia looked genuinely bewildered. "She said I was getting rather old to live here at Marshdale, and I didn't see why I should be too old to live in my own home. But then I thought perhaps she meant that I should be in the way. Because, you see, if you and she cared for one another, and you

wanted to marry her, you naturally wouldn't want a great tiresome grown-up ward in your house. And so then—I decided I had better ask you to let me go away and do some work." During the naïve explanation John's face had by turns darkened and brightened, but when she ended, he laughed again, a laugh that held in it a ring of unadulterated joy.

"Oh! that was it, was it?" he said mischievously; "you thought you had better go away and work, so as to make room for Mrs. Danvers to come here and take your place? That was her clever scheme for getting rid of you?"

"I suppose so." Sylvia looked a little mystified. "I don't know whether she really wanted to get rid of me. It seems unkind to imagine those sort of motives for her; and perhaps she really did believe you had gone on caring for her. And if she thought that, she would be very unhappy if she knew——"

"*Unhappy,*" John broke in with a laugh, "she is not unhappy in the way you mean, little Sylvia. And she knows with the most complete certainty that nothing she could do or say would ever make me care for her again. She killed my love with her own hands. She is only a part of my past, and a past I never wish to remember any more."

"I believe I'm rather glad," Sylvia said simply; "I don't think she would really have made you happy, and she wouldn't have known about all your little ways, would she?"

"Oh! she wouldn't have known about all my little ways?" John questioned in low, teasing tones; "and my ward knows about them, doesn't she?"

"Of course I do. Why, I know just every single thing you like, and don't like, and all you want, and—I'm so used to you, you see," she ended rather abruptly, because the look in John's face was making her heart give those queer incomprehensible jumps again.

"And you don't really want to go away and work?" John asked.

"Oh! no." It was impossible to mistake the sincerity of the answer. "I couldn't bear to go away. I thought that if I went, you could be happy with her—and——"

"Do you know what I thought?" John had drawn a little closer to her, and laid his hand over hers. "I thought perhaps you found this house dull and gloomy: that perhaps after all your travels, all the young friends you had made, you were finding life here intolerable, and discovering that I was just an old fogey."

"An old fogey? *You?*" She laughed her glad little laugh. "Why, you aren't a bit old! How dreadfully silly—of course you are not an old fogey."

"You know, I haven't asked you the other questions I was told to ask you," John answered rather irrelevantly, and his hand held hers in a tighter clasp. "The other questions are really the most important of the two. I was told to ask you—what you think of me, little Sylvia? and whether

you find me an old fogey and want to go away from me?" He said the words very slowly, and his eyes looked deep into her eyes, until their glance faltered under his, and the colour crept over her face again.

"You know I don't want to go away from you," she said under her breath, "and of course you are not an old fogey! And what do I think about you? Why—you know what I think—I think there is nobody in the world like—Mr. John."

"And supposing"—he bent his head to look into her downcast face—"supposing I told you that the little girl who came to me nine years ago, is more to me than any other woman has ever been, or ever could be? Supposing I told you that the little girl had crept into my heart? Supposing I told you that the little girl who came to my wretched house and brought the sunshine with her, had led me back by her love, to goodness and to God—would the little girl stay here for always, and go on helping me?"

"For always," Sylvia said, lifting her face, and putting her other hand into his; "I could not ever bear to go away from you—there is nobody in all the world like Mr. John."

He drew her into his arms and kissed her lips, and all at once, with her old childish gesture, she put her arms about his neck.

"Mr. John," she whispered, "oh, Mr. John—do you remember how we called this bed the place of the Sleeping Beauty? But now—it is all like the

real Sleeping Beauty—the garden, and you—and I——"

"You and I," he repeated softly, when she paused.

"I think I was asleep until you came and—kissed me," she said, flushing vividly, "but now—the Prince has woke me up—and I am glad—oh! I am so very glad. You see I know now that you are the real Prince, the one who will give me the best sort of love, and the blackbird is as glad as we are; he is singing to tell us about his gladness and ours. I expect he has got his own Sleeping Beauty, and he is her Prince." And from the swaying bough of the blossoming pear tree there broke out again the fluting notes of the blackbird's song, all the joy and glory of spring vibrating again in his glad, triumphant song.

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